THE MAXX

maximized

Sam Kieth

The classic comic by Sam Kieth is back in this remastered edition that collects issues #25–30 of *The Maxx* with all-new colors by Ronda Pattison.

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ISBN-13: 978-1631406614
52499
9 781631 406614
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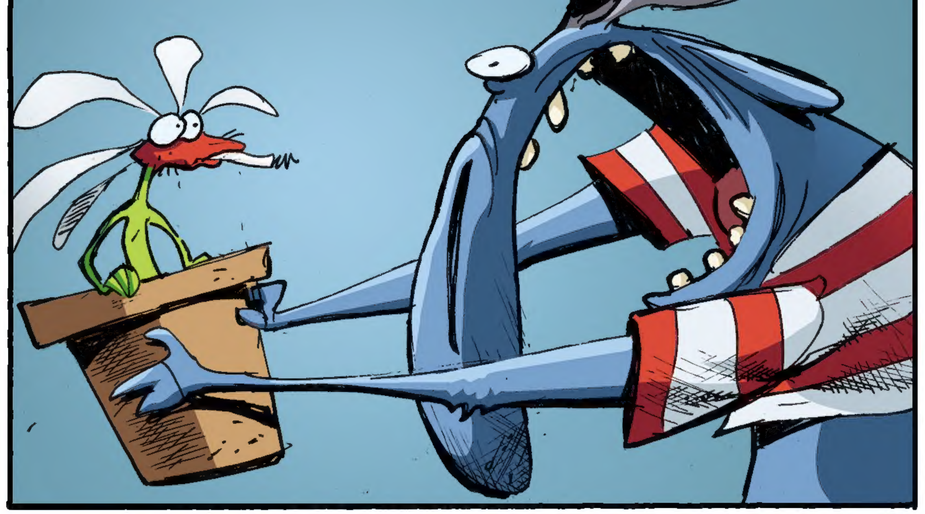

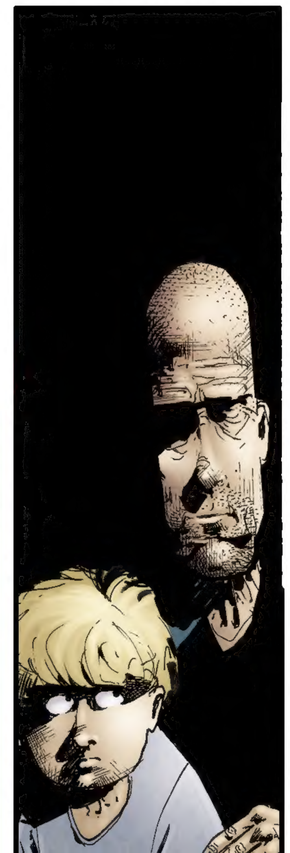

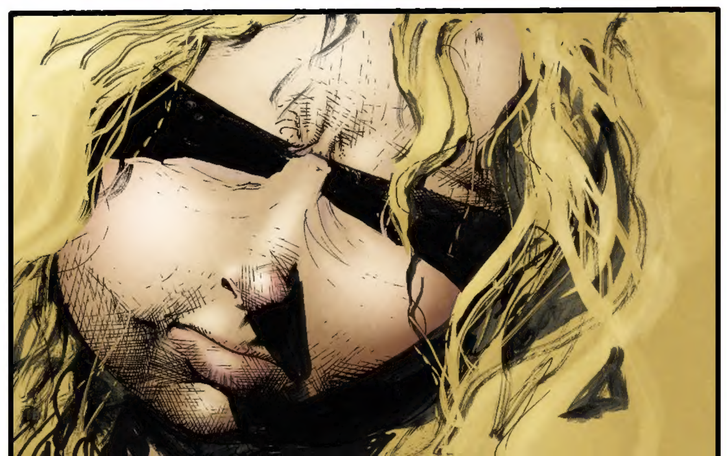

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eISBN: 978-1-68406-001-6

DIGITAL

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Originally published as THE MAXX: MAXXIMIZED issues #25–30.

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Chapter One

WAXED

OKAY, I'VE *GOT* IT. CAME IN TODAY'S MAIL. SO *NOW* WHAT?

WE *OPEN IT* AND SEE WHO'S ON THE *LIST.* WE MUST FIND WHAT IAGO'S VICTIMS HAVE IN *COMMON.* SOME THREAD...

Y'KNOW, MAXX, I THOUGHT THE GENERAL IDEA OF A *MASK* WAS TO *COVER* YOUR FACE.

YOU DON'T *LIKE* IT? I MADE IT FROM GARBAGE, OLD JUNK, AND USED

NEVER MIND, IT'S FINE. CAN WE JUST GET *ON* WITH THIS?

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THE *CRAP* WE WENT THROUGH LAST WEEK TRYING TO *GET* THESE. IT STILL MAKES MY STOMACH *QUEASY* JUST THINKING ABOUT IT.

LOST AND FOUND

YOU *COMPLAIN* A LOT FOR A *PRINCESS.*

YEAH, A *"PRINCESS"* STANDING IN A *JUNK YARD* IN *CUTOFFS* TALKING TO A *DEFORMED BUM* WHO'S WEARING MY *QUILT* AS A *CAPE.*

I STILL REMEMBER THE ODD LIST OF STUFF THAT YOU HAD ME GET.

OKAY, NORBERT, IT'S ALL HERE.

TWENTY BAGS OF ICE...

...A BOX OF UNCOOKED FISH...

...A 10X10 SHEET OF WATERPROOF PLASTIC...

...AND HALF A DOZEN LARGE SCREWS.

WHAT ABOUT THE *SQUIRT GUNS?*

THEY'RE BACK AT THE HOUSE, SO WHAT'S UP?

YOU'LL SEE! BUT FIRST, WE'LL ALSO NEED ONE OF THESE CARRIAGES.

OKAY, *NOW* YOU'VE GOT ME *STEALING CARS.* GREAT.

WE'LL BRING IT BACK.

WELL, LUCKY FOR YOU, I'M NOT THE *GOODY-TWO-SHOES* YOU MIGHT THINK. PICKING LOCKS IS SOMETHING I JUST HAPPEN TO BE VERY *GOOD* AT.

NOW LISTEN AND LEARN...

THE THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT IT TAKES A VERY DELICATE...

GRASH!

...TOUCH.

OKAY, THIS IS WHAT I *REALLY* KNOW. HOT WIRING'S CAKE.

UH... SARA...

IF WE JUST TURN THIS *SCREWDRIVER* THAT'S JAMMED INTO THE IGNITION--

OH YEAH, SURE... YOU COULD DO THAT TOO...

OKAY, I'LL SPREAD OUT THE PLASTIC! YOU SOME KIND OF EXPERT WITH THAT TOO?

YOU SPREAD IT VERY WELL.

DON'T *PUSH* IT, NORBERT.

THE SCREWS SHOULD HOLD THE PLASTIC IN PLACE. NOW WE MUST HURRY BEFORE THE ICE MELTS. GO TO THE ST. EVANS PIER.

SARA, TELL ME OF THE WOMAN YOU KNEW, WHO ALSO HAD A SPIRIT ANIMAL.

ICE

THERE'S NOT MUCH TO *TELL*. WE USED TO HANG OUT TOGETHER A LOT. THEN WE... WE STOPPED.

WHY? WHAT HAPPENED?

DID I TELL YOU HER KID SHOWED UP? GONE TOLD ME.

DO YOU BELIEVE HIM?

YEAH, I DO. WEIRD, HUH? BUT I FIGURE HE CAN'T ***LIE*** 24 HOURS A DAY. HE'S GOT TO TAKE A BREAK SOMETIME.

SO WHY DID YOU AND THIS WOMAN LOSE TOUCH? WHAT HAP--

LOOK, MAXX, JUST ***DROP*** IT, OKAY? IT'S IN THE PAST.

OKAY.

I ***HATE*** THE SMELL OF RAW FISH. I ***HATE*** WATER. JUST BEING TRAPPED UNDER THE PIER BY YOUR ***SLUG*** CLINCHED IT. THERE'S ALL SORTS OF WEIRD CRAP DOWN THERE READY TO ***GET*** YOU.

FISH

IN PANGEA, WATER IS ***EVERYWHERE.*** IT'S LIKE THE ***AIR*** HERE. YOU NEED IT TO ***BREATHE.***

SO WHAT ARE WE CATCHING? CRABS? ***PIRANHAS?***

YOU ***KNOW,*** SARA, IT'S WHAT IAGO WAS ***FEEDING*** THAT NIGHT HE FOUND YOU--

GULP SHU-GLUB GOBBLE GULP

MAXX, I *TOLD* YOU, I DON'T *BELIEVE* IN FAIRIES, EXPLODING OR OTHERWISE.

IT WAS BIG ROUND *FISHIES* THAT ATTACKED ME THAT NIGHT.

IF YOU SAY SO, HELP ME GET THESE *"BIG ROUND FISHIES"* INTO THE CARRIAGE.

REMEMBER, IF THEY DRY OUT, THEY WILL FLOAT UP AND EXPLODE...SO THE ICE WILL KEEP THEM *COOL* AND *WET* AND *SLOWED DOWN.*

UH... UH...

JUST *HIT* HIM!

BONK

I DON'T SEE WHY YOU ACCEPT A *SLUG* BUT NOT A *FAIRY.*

JUST REMEMBER... WET FA--

WET FAIRIES GOOD, DRY FAIRIES BAD... WET FAIRIES GOOD, DRY FAIRIES BAD... WET FAIRIES GOOD, DRY FAIRIES BAD...

SARA, ABOUT THAT WOMAN... IT'S *NOT* IN THE PAST, IF HER SON'S HERE, MAYBE YOU SHOUL--

YOU'RE BACK ON *THAT?* LISTEN, YOU WANT TO KNOW *WHY* WE'RE NO LONGER FRIENDS?

'CAUSE *I* LET HER DOWN, THAT'S WHY! NOW YOU KNOW! HAPPY?

EVERY TIME I THINK OF HER, ALL I CAN THINK OF IS HOW I *BETRAYED* HER.

YOU'RE CARRYING QUITE A LOAD.

YEAH, WELL, MAYBE I DESERVE IT.

NO, I MEAN MAYBE I SHOULD HELP YOU *PULL* INSTEAD OF *PUSHING.*

THAT'S OKAY. =*GRUNT*= ON STAIRS LIKE THESE I'D RATHER BE WHERE *I* AM INSTEAD OF WHERE *YOU* ARE, NO OFFENSE.

MAN, THESE... *"THINGS"* WEIGH A TON.

THE PRINCESS HAS A HEAVY HEART. HOW DID SHE BETRAY HER LONG-LOST FRIEND?

OKAY, YOU WANT TO KNOW, HERE IT *IS.*

THIS WOMAN I KNEW USED TO ***TAKE OFF*** AND ***LEAVE TOWN*** WITH NO WARNING, WHENEVER LIFE'S PRESSURES WERE TOO MUCH. WELL, WHILE SHE WAS OUT ON ONE OF THOSE BINGES--

--I...WELL, I ***ASSUMED*** SOMEBODY WAS LOOKING AFTER...

...I MEAN, FOR ***GOD'S SAKE,*** MAXX, HE WAS ***FIVE!*** HE HADN'T EATEN, WAS SITTING IN HIS OWN...YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW.

ANYWAY, I CALLED C.P.S., THEY TOOK THE KID, JULIE CAME HOME AND FLEW INTO A RAGE, SUNK INTO DEPRESSION, AND TOOK TO THE STREET WITH THE KID.

DID SHE KNOW YOU MADE THE CALL?

NO.

I WAS TOO CHICKENSH*T TO TELL HER.

SLAM

HURRY, MY PRINCESS, WE MUST WORK FAST.

I WILL EXTRACT THE *DIGITS* FROM THE FAIRIES, WHILE *YOU* KEEP THEM WET WITH THE SQUIRT GUNS, OKAY?

SARA..?

SARA?!

UH...OKAY, OKAY. THIS IS SO *%&@#ING BIZARRE!* JUST GIVE ME A SEC--

WE DON'T *HAVE* A SECOND. IS THIS THE KNIFE?

YEAH.

A *BUTTER KNIFE?*

IF I'D KNOWN WE'D BE MUTILATING FAIRIES I'D'VE BOUGHT A *GINSU*, OKAY?

NOW, TELL ME AGAIN WHAT WE'RE DOING HERE, MAXX..

MOST OF THE LARGER PARTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN DIGESTED, HOPE-FULLY LEAVING-- *BINGO*. THE VICTIMS' FINGERS, TOES...

PLEASE DON'T PUKE, PLEASE.

UH... MAXX?

A COUPLE OF 'EM ARE GOING AWOL.

THUMP

SPLAT!

CRAP! HE BLEW UP!

PLOP

DRY FAIRIES FLOAT UP AND *EXPLODE*-- REMEMBER TO KEEP SQUIRTING THE OTHERS!

THEY *ALL* WILL, UNLESS WE CAN KEEP THEM *MOIST.*

WE'LL GET THOSE *LATER.* JUST KEEP SQUIRTING *THESE.*

RIGHT, I KEEP FORGETTING...

KEEP SQUIRTING
KEEP SQUIRTING
KEEP SQUIRTING

SQUIRT

SQUIRT

THERE GOES THE SECOND ONE...

MAXX, WHY DON'T WE JUST LET 'EM *ALL* EXPLODE AND THEN COLLECT THE FINGERS?

YOU REALLY WANT YOUR CEILING FULL OF FAIRY CARCASSES?

YEAH, YEAH, I KNOW.

I'M GONNA HAVE *NIGHTMARES* ABOUT THIS FOR *YEARS!*

BESIDES, *CUTTING* THEM *OPEN* IS FAR MORE *HUMANE* THAN LETTING THEM ALL *EXPLODE!*

OOOKAAAY, WHATEVER.

BE SURE TO COLLECT--

KNOCK KNOCK

SARA? IT'S ME, STEVE! IS THAT YOU?

OH MY GOD! IT'S STEVE!

QUICK, HIDE EVERYTHING!

WHERE?!

SARA, WHY'S THE DOOR LOCKED? LET ME IN!

JUST A SEC!

OH SH*T!

COMING...

IF STEVE SEES ALL THIS, HE'LL CRACK FOR SURE!

CLING!

YOU SOUND FUNNY--YOU GOT A GUY IN THERE?

OH GOD...

IT'S OKAY, I'VE GOT A KEY HERE, SOMEWHERE...

NO, WAIT!

SARA, THEY'RE DRYING UP!

THANK GOD THEY DIDN'T ROLL UNDER THE DOOR...

SARA!

SPLAT!

...NEVER MIND.

THERE!

SO WHAT'S THE BIG...

...DEAL.

STEVE...? YOU LOOK A LITTLE...

...FAINT.

THUMP

OHHH, MY ***HEAD*** ACHES. WHAT HAPPENED?

YOU PASSED OUT.

REALLY? WOW, THAT'S WEIRD, BECAUSE WHEN I WALKED INTO THE ROOM, I ***SWEAR*** I HAD A PSYCHIC VISION.

OH? WHAT'D YOU SEE?

TO BE HONEST, SARA, I'M NOT SURE YOU HAVE THE NECESSARY ***EXPERIENCE*** OR ***SENSITIVITY*** TO ***COMPREHEND*** IT. BUT I BELIEVE THERE'S ANOTHER ***DIMENSION*** PARALLEL TO OURS, WHERE SMALL PINK CLUSTERS OF ENERGY ARE CONSTANTLY ***EXPLODING.***

WHEN I CAME HOME, FOR AN INSTANT, I ***SAW*** ALL THIS!

ALTHOUGH I'M SURE ***YOU*** AND ***NORBERT*** BELIEVE YOU WERE ALONE IN A ***NORMAL*** KITCHEN.

YOU MEAN WE ***WEREN'T?*** STOP IT, STEVE, YOU'RE SCARING ME.

THE NEXT EVENING, AFTER STEVE LEFT, I TOOK ***IAGO'S*** VICTIMS' ***FINGERS*** FROM THE CAN IN THE BACK OF THE ***FREEZER.***

I THOUGHT I WAS GONNA ***LOSE IT*** WHILE GETTING THE ***FINGERPRINTS,*** BUT NORBERT REMINDED ME THAT PERFORMING THIS ***GROTESQUE TASK*** WAS THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE ***FUTURE*** VICTIMS...

...AND ALSO THE ONLY WAY TO SEND IAGO BACK WHERE HE CAME FROM...WHICH IS, STRANGELY ENOUGH, ***INSIDE*** OF ***ME.***

I COULDN'T FLUSH THE FINGERS DOWN THE DISPOSAL FAST ENOUGH.

HHHH

HEY MISTER, YOU NAMED DAVE?

WHAT OF IT?

WELL, I'M LOOKING FOR MY MOM, ***JULIE WINTERS.*** I HEAR YOU USED TO ***KNOW*** HER, AND I--

JULIE...

YEAH, I'D HEARD SHE WAS STILL AROUND, IN AND OUT OF SHELTERS, BUT IT'S BEEN ***TEN YEARS*** SINCE I'VE EVEN ***SPOKEN*** TO HER. WHY WOULD YOU COME TO--

LISTEN, SHE THOUGHT THAT SOMEBODY WAS TRYING TO ***KILL*** HER. YOU KNOW, THE RUMORS 'BOUT SOME BIG GUY IN A YELLOW COAT, DRAGGIN' ***BUMS*** OUT TO THE SHORE AND ***KILLING*** 'EM! SHE WAS CONVINCED SHE WAS ***NEXT!***

LOOK, KID...I'M SORRY, BUT YER MOM PROBABLY ***TOLD*** YOU THAT STORY, SO YOU'D ***GIVE UP*** ON HER AND SHE COULD ***DITCH*** YOU.

SHE ALREADY DITCHED ME, ***DOZENS*** OF TIMES...

...BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I'M GONNA ***STOP LOOKIN'.***

OKAY, FAIR ENOUGH. I KNOW OF ONE PLACE SHE MIGHT BE...

...IF WE'RE NOT TOO LATE.

IT'S LIKE A BAD *NIGHTMARE,* MAXX. IT'S BEEN TWO WEEKS AND I *STILL* CAN'T GET THOSE FINGERS GOING DOWN THE GARBAGE DISPOSAL OUT OF MY MIND.

YES, BUT NOW OUR WORK HAS PAID OFF, AND YOUR FRIEND AT THE AGENCY CAME THROUGH. FROM THOSE *FINGERPRINTS,* WE'LL KNOW THE NAMES OF IAGO'S VICTIMS.

Y'KNOW, I'VE BEEN THINKING 'BOUT WHAT YOU SAID, 'BOUT JULIE'S SON BEING A CHANCE TO PATCH THINGS UP WITH HER...TO LET HER KNOW WHAT I *DID.* I MEAN, IF SHE CAN'T *FORGIVE* ME, FINE. BUT AT LEAST...

BUT AT LEAST SHE'D *KNOW?*

EXACTLY.

WELL, NOW'S YOUR CHANCE.

YEAH. Y'KNOW, SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE EVERYONE THAT I GET CLOSE TO *LEAVES* ME! DADDY WHEN I WAS LITTLE, THEN THE *FIRST* MAXX BECAME A BUM AND LEFT...

...THEN I BLOW IT WITH *JULIE,* AND CAUSE HER TO SPLIT. NOW ALL THAT'S LEFT IS MOM, AND SHE HASN'T GOT LONG. THAT'S WHY THIS THING WITH JULIE COULD MEAN...

...HOPE.

NOW, LET'S SEE THE ***NAMES*** OF ALL OF THOSE POOR SUCKERS THAT'VE BEEN ***FAIRY FOOD***, THEN MAYBE WE--WE...

SARA? WHAT IS IT?

YOU LOOK PALE... WHAT'S WRONG?

SARA...?

VEGA, VINCENT

WOJEHIEWICZ, JOHN

WAGNER, DONNA

YEE, MICHAEL

YOUNG, NELSON

WILLIAMS, BRUCE

ZEDROW, CATHERINE

WINTERS, JULIA

GRUMPLE

Chapter
Two

I KNOW, I KNOW.

I PROMISED.

SO I LIED.

BESIDES, DADDY *POINTING OUT* TO ME WHERE HE KEEPS HIS DIARY, THEN *FORBIDDING* ME TO READ IT...WELL...

C'MON! IT'S OBVIOUS HE *WANTS* ME TO KNOW ABOUT HIS LIFE.

OKAY, I JUST WANT TO KNOW.

BESIDES, AFTER THE DOO-DOO WEEK I'VE HAD--DISSECTING FAIRIES, TELLING NORBERT ABOUT HOW I LET JULIE DOWN SO LONG AGO, THEN FINALLY WORKING UP THE GUTS TO ADMIT IT TO *HER*, AND THEN FINDING OUT....

...LIKE I SAID, A HELL OF A WEEK.

BUT PART OF ME JUST CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT I'M WRONG, THAT JULIE'S ALIVE OUT THERE, SOMEWHERE...

I CAN'T SAY GOODBYE TO HER YET--

I WON'T.

OKAY, HERE WE ARE..."*THE BOOK OF GONE, DIARY OF ARTEMUS PENDER GONE, PART ONE, THE ROAD DOWN*".

OUTBACK

Y'KNOW, SITTING HERE, I JUST FLASHED ON HOW MUCH READING THIS REMINDS ME OF THE STORIES GRAMPS WOULD READ ME AS A KID, MAYBE BECAUSE OF THOSE OLD FAMILIAR WORDS...

"*ONCE UPON A*...

PATTERNS,

MY ESCAPE, MY REFUGE.

AS A BOY, WHENEVER LIFE GOT ROUGH, I'D LOOK UP AT THE PATTERNS ON MY CEILING...

...AND FLOAT AWAY.

MY FOLKS DIED WHEN I WAS LITTLE.

I WAS SENT TO LIVE WITH MY AUNT RUTH.

PAT

I LOVED AUNT RUTH,

BUT FOR SOME STRANGE REASON...

...I GREW UP HATING AND FEARING WOMEN. THEY WERE EVIL. I WAS SURE OF IT.

EXCEPT AUNT RUTH, OF COURSE.

SOMETIMES I'D DO WRONG, AND BE PUNISHED, BUT I ALWAYS KNEW WHY...

ARTIE

...I ***DESERVED*** IT. ***INSIDE*** I WAS AN UGLY, PERVERTED LITTLE WORM.

I DID NOT KNOW HOW I GOT TO BE THIS WAY. I ONLY KNEW I WAS.

EVERYONE KNEW. AT SCHOOL, HOME, EVERYWHERE, I WAS A STUPID AND CLUMSY FOOL.

MY ONLY SOLACE WAS AUNT RUTH.

FROM HER I LEARNED NOT ONLY ***TO*** LOVE, BUT ***HOW*** TO LOVE. FROM HER I LEARNED...

...PATTERNS.

THEY TAKE YOU AWAY...

...HELP YOU FORGET...

...NOT BE THERE.

BY THE TIME I WAS 11, I WAS DETERMINED TO FIND OUT WHY I WAS SUCH A ***DISAPPOINTMENT*** TO AUNT RUTH, AND EVERYONE ELSE.

I READ EVERYTHING I COULD UNDERSTAND. PHYSICS, METAPHYSICS, PHILOSOPHY. BUT NOTHING HELPED. I LONGED FOR MAGIC POWERS TO HELP ME ESCAPE MY MISERABLE LIFE. BUT MOSTLY I JUST READ, FOR THE SAME REASON I LOOKED AT WALLPAPER...

...TO ESCAPE.

BY THAT TIME, AUNT RUTH NEEDED MORE AND MORE CARE, WHICH I RESENTED.

SHE HIRED A "BABY SITTER". ***DEXTER.*** HE'D LAUGH AND BEAT ME UP WHEN WE WERE ALONE...

...AND FORCED ME TO DO...

...OTHER STUFF...

HE SAID HE'D BURN DOWN OUR HOUSE IF I DIDN'T. I KNOW HE WOULD'VE DONE IT.

I REMEMBER THINKING THAT THIS MUST BE WHAT BABY SITTERS DO.

I HATED HIM.

AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS HE QUIT. I DON'T KNOW WHY.

NEXT AUNT RUTH GOT SOME GIRL TO TAKE OVER. LUCKY ME.

AT LEAST ***THIS*** ONE DIDN'T BEAT ME UP.

BUT I KNEW WHAT WAS EXPECTED...

...OR THOUGHT I DID.

HEY, YOU LITTLE PERVERT! STOP THAT!

SNAP

AUNT RUTH BEAT ME HARDER THAN SHE EVER HAD BEFORE. SHE WANTED TO KNOW WHERE I HAD LEARNED STUFF LIKE THAT.

I NEVER TOLD HER. SHE'D NEVER HAVE BELIEVED ME. I WAS AFRAID ***"BEING WITH DEXTER"*** HAD TURNED ME INTO A ***SISSY.*** I WOULD NEVER TELL ANYONE ABOUT THAT.

THAT NIGHT I RAN AWAY. IT WAS NO GREAT LOSS, BECAUSE BEING IN THAT HOUSE WITH AUNT RUTH ONLY REMINDED ME WHAT A WORTHLESS AND ROTTEN KID I WAS.

SCREW WALLPAPER. I'D LITERALLY ESCAPE!

OR SO I THOUGHT.

1ST WIFE

IN MY TWENTIES I MOVED TO BORA BORA, WHERE I MET MY FIRST MISTAKE, CELIA. SHE SWORE THAT IF I MARRIED HER, SHE'D GIVE UP HOOKING AND HEROIN --WHICH SHE INSTANTLY RENEGED ON, WHICH IS WHY I MARRIED HER, OF COURSE.

IT WAS ABOUT THIS TIME THAT I SET OUT TO LEARN WHY WOMEN SCARED AND ANGERED ME SO. IT WAS PUZZLING, ASIDE FROM THE OCCASIONAL PUNISHMENT, MY AUNT HAD SHOWN ME NOTHING BUT LOVE.

I DIDN'T GET IT. WHERE DID IT COME FROM, THIS FEAR OF THE FEMININE? AND WHY WERE CELIA'S WORST QUALITIES THOSE THAT KEPT ME WITH HER?

METAPHYSICS

I OFTEN CAME HOME...

...TO FIND HER STRUNG OUT. WHEN SHE AWOKE...

...I'D BE BLAMED.

SHE'D YELL AND SCREAM, THEN APOLOGIZE AFTERWARDS.

THEN I'D FEEL SECRETLY SUPERIOR.

AND THEN, EVENTUALLY, I'D FEEL SORRY FOR HER...

...AND THEN I'D "HELP" HER.

A JUNKIE'S RARELY IN THE MOOD, AND I GOT PHYSICALLY ILL AT THE THOUGHT OF NORMAL RELATIONS. I DON'T KNOW WHY.

I'D DEVELOPED A FETISH OF WEARING A PARKA AND BAG OVER MY HEAD. I SHARED IT WITH CELIA ONCE...

WHAT'RE YOU, *JOKING?!* WHAT AN IDIOT YOU LOOK LIKE! TAKE IT OFF!

AFTER THAT WE DID IT "NORMALLY", BUT I WASN'T THERE.

I FELT NAUSEA.

SO MANY TIMES I'D AWAKE TO CELIA ACCUSING ME OF HIDING MONEY SO THAT SHE COULDN'T SHOOT UP.

I'D USE ANY EXCUSE TO INDULGE MY FEAR OF THE FEMININE, AND CELIA GAVE ME EVERY OPPORTUNITY.

THE COMING OF OUR FIRST BABY GAVE ME HOPE!

BUT EVEN WITH CHILD, CELIA CONTINUED HOOKING FOR DRUG MONEY.

I'D OFTEN THROW STRANGERS OUT OF OUR BEDROOM.

GET OUT!

SHE WASN'T WORTH IT.

I NAMED OUR SON PHRED. HE WAS AMAZING. I LOVED THE LITTLE GUY. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I WAS HAPPY.

PAT PAT PAT

I SUSPECTED CELIA OF BEATING PHRED, AND SHE ADMITTED IT.

SHE BEGGED ME NOT TO LEAVE HER. SHE SAID SHE'D ***NEVER*** TOUCH PHRED AGAIN.

SHORTLY AFTER, I HAD TO LEAVE TOWN FOR A WEEK ON BUSINESS.

CELIA WAS PISSED! BUT I HAD TO GO.

FINDING CELIA ***HIGH*** WHEN I RETURNED WAS NO SURPRISE, BUT TO MY HORROR...

...PHRED'S ***EYES*** HAD BEEN ***REMOVED***, WITH THE ***SKIN SEWN*** OVER THE SOCKETS.

CELIA SAID A DOCTOR IN TOWN HAD NEEDED AN EYE TRANSPLANT, AND SHE'D SOLD HIM PHRED'S EYES FOR A BIG BOX OF MORPHINE.

MY FEARS OF WOMEN AND THE FEMININE WERE WELL PLACED. CELIA TOOK THE ONLY THING I EVER LOVED, AS PHRED DIED SOON AFTERWARDS.

I WANTED TO KILL CELIA, BUT SHE BEAT ME TO IT, O.D.ING A MONTH LATER.

THE SAD TRUTH IS, IF SHE HAD LIVED, I WOULD'VE STAYED WITH HER. I FELT I DESERVED TO BE PUNISHED.

AND THAT'S THE ONE THING ME AND CELIA BOTH AGREED ON.

2ND WIFE

IN MY MID-THIRTIES I MOVED BACK TO THE STATES, AND MARRIED MY SECOND MISTAKE, JUDY.

JUDY WAS EVERYTHING CELIA WASN'T.

AND AFTER PHRED, I WOULD NEVER TRUST WOMEN AGAIN.

EXACTING REVENGE FROM ***JUDY*** FOR THE WAY ***CELIA*** HAD HUMILIATED ME MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING JUDY FELT SHE SOMEHOW ***DESERVED.***

I COULD SEE THE SAME LOOK OF DEPENDENCE IN HER FACE THAT I SHOWED CELIA. SO WE TRADED PLACES, I WAS CELIA, AND JUDY WAS...***ME.***

JUDY NEVER UNDERSTOOD WHY I'D GET ***SICK*** TRYING TO MAKE LOVE. BUT IT ALWAYS HAPPENED.

I'D LIE THERE THINKING ABOUT HOW WORTHLESS WOMEN ARE, BLAMING JUDY FOR MY OWN PROBLEMS.

I'D WONDER WHY JUDY PUT UP WITH ME DEMEANING HER SO.

BUT I ALREADY KNEW THE ANSWER, AFTER LIVING WITH CELIA.

I'D NOTICE JUDY SNEAKING BOOZE INTO THE BATHROOM WHEN SHE THOUGHT I WAS ASLEEP.

WHEN JUDY LAUGHED AT MY BAG, I MADE HER WEAR IT.

THE THRILL OF HUMILIATING SOMEONE ELSE WAS EXCITING, FOR A CHANGE.

PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF

BUT LATER I FELT GUILTY.

CELIA WAS ONLY ***OBLIVIOUS...*** I WAS BECOMING A CRUEL PERVERT.

WHERE WAS ALL THIS HATE COMING FROM?

PLEASE FORGIVE ME, HONEY.

LATER I'D STEW ABOUT DEMEANING MYSELF IN FRONT OF HER.

THINGS GOT UGLY. ONCE I CAUGHT JUDY DRINKING, AND SLAPPED HER AROUND.

SHE TOLD HER BROTHER AND HE CAME OVER AND BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF ME! HE ALSO BEAT *HER* UP FOR *TELLING.*

POP

GRUNT

GRUNT

THAT NIGHT JUDY HEARD ME TALKING IN MY SLEEP. WHATEVER I WAS SAYING WAS GIVING ME NIGHTMARES...

THE NEXT MORNING SHE TOLD ME...

YOU WERE TALKING IN YOUR SLEEP... YOU SAID--

I MUST'VE BLACKED OUT AT THOSE WORDS, BECAUSE...

...I AWOKE *TWO DAYS LATER,* IN THAT *SAME SPOT!*

JUDY HADN'T CALLED A DOCTOR OR ANYTHING!!

SHE JUST LEFT ME THERE LIKE THAT FOR *TWO WHOLE DAYS.*

AFTER THAT I KNEW I COULD NO LONGER TRUST JUDY. MAYBE IT WAS THE BOTTLE, OR MAYBE SHE WAS JUST SICK OF MY SH*T...

WHATEVER IT WAS, SHE'D FOUND A WEAK SPOT.

SHE'D COME AND STAND OVER ME WHENEVER I GOT SICK, CREEPING ME OUT.

AND SHE'D DRINK IN FRONT OF ME NOW! SHE DIDN'T CARE!

SHE WENT ALONG WITH MY GAMES...

BUT I COULD FEEL HER HATRED...

PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF PUFF

...READY TO...

...BLOW.

ONE DAY SHE WHISPERED THAT SAME PHRASE...

...AND I AWOKE IN TRACTION.

WHEN I GOT HOME, JUDY HAD MOVED OUT FOR GOOD.

BY MY FORTIES I'D MOVED AWAY TO AUSTRALIA, TRYING TO FORGET WHAT I'D INFLICTED OR HAD BEEN INFLICTED ON ME BY VARIOUS WOMEN IN MY LIFE.

I BEFRIENDED SOME ABORIGINAL NATIVES WHO TOOK ME IN.

I WAS HORRIFIED TO FIND THAT A GROUP OF THE NATIVE CHILDREN THERE WERE VICTIMS OF ORGAN EXPERIMENTS, JUST LIKE PHRED.

I FELT A SPECIAL BOND WITH THESE CHILDREN WHO CLUSTERED AROUND ME, BLINDLY FEELING THEIR WAY.

I LIVED THERE FOR YEARS, LEARNING THEIR TRADITIONS, THOUGH I OFTEN FELT THEY WERE HUMORING ME.

FOR YEARS I TRIED TO MASTER THEIR MAGICAL ART OF *"WALKING IN THE DREAMTIME"*, WITH NO SUCCESS.

THEN, ONE DAY, I ***DID*** IT! I'D PENETRATED SOMEONE'S OUTBACK.

UNFORTUNATELY, I HAD NO IDEA WHOSE IT WAS.

LATER I AWOKE ALONE, WITH NO SIGN OF THE TRIBE. UPON RETURNING TO TOWN, I WAS INFORMED THE PEOPLE I LIVED WITH DID NOT EXIST.

I RETURNED TO THE STATES TO VISIT AN OLD SCHOOL CHUM AND HIS WIFE.

THEY TOOK ME IN, AND I TOLD THEM OF MY TRAVELS, AND ADVENTURES...

...AS I ALSO TOLD THEIR LITTLE DAUGHTER, JULIE.

FOR I HADN'T JUST LEARNED TO WALK IN MINDS IN AUSTRALIA. NO, I HAD ***REALIZED,*** IN THAT MOMENT, THE ***ONE REASON*** I'VE BEEN ANGRY AND AFRAID OF WOMEN MY WHOLE LIFE--WHY I'D PUT UP WITH CELIA, AND WHY JUDY HAD PUT UP WITH ME, THE SICKNESS, THE PAPER BAGS, PARKAS, DEXTER, AUNT RUTH, ***EVERYTHING*** ALL CAME DOWN TO THIS ONE THING...

...BUT I FORGOT TO WRITE IT DOWN.

I REMEMBER IT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH... ***ABUSE,*** THOUGH.

ANYWAY, THE ABORIGINES HAD POWER SPOTS! HERE THEY WERE PUBLIC STORAGE BINS! I FOUND A CIRCULAR GROUP OF 24 BINS TO EXPLORE STRANGERS' *"OUTBACKS"*.

I EVEN TALKED MY CHUM JOHN WINTERS INTO KEEPING HIS DAUGHTER'S OLD STUFF IN ONE, SHE'D GONE TO COLLEGE AND THEY NEEDED THE ROOM.

NOW, WITH JULIE'S STUFF STORED, I WOULDN'T BE LIMITED TO THE OUTBACKS OF 24 ***STRANGERS...***

...I COULD WATCH SOMEONE I KNEW PERSONALLY, AS HER OUTBACK DEVELOPED.

I THOUGHT THIS STUFF WOULD MAKE ME FEEL ***CLOSER*** TO YOU!

INSTEAD I JUST FEEL SICK KNOWING ABOUT ALL THE ABUSE YOU ***SUFFERED THROUGH*** AND ***GAVE OUT!*** IT JUSTIFIES NOTHING...

I MEAN ***JEEZ!*** IS THERE ANYBODY WHO ***ISN'T*** USING THE *"I WAS ABUSED AS A CHILD, AND THAT'S WHY I DID IT"* DEFENSE? GIMME A BREAK.

3RD WIFE

BY FIFTY YEARS OLD YOU'D THINK I'D'VE ***LEARNED,*** HUH? THE THIRD MISTAKE WAS A BLESSING IN DISGUISE, BECAUSE IT GAVE US ***YOU.***

LOVE NOT WAR

TILLY JONES WAS 17 IN 1971. I DON'T KNOW ***WHAT*** SHE SAW IN ME, SHE SAID MY OLD-FASHIONED-NESS WAS CUTE,

AND SHE BROUGHT OUT EVERYTHING THAT ***WASN'T.***

BUT I PUSHED ALL THAT DOWN.

SOON YOU CAME ALONG!

IT WAS LIKE HOPE ALL OVER AGAIN. THIS WAS MY SECOND CHANCE, AND I LOVED YOU, MORE THAN WORDS... LITTLE SARA.

I KNEW I STILL HAD A RESERVOIR OF ANGER, LURKING...

HENDRIX

...BUT I ***HID*** IT.

ONCE I AWOKE FROM A NIGHTMARE ABOUT HURTING YOU, LIKE CELIA HAD DONE TO PHRED!

I'D NEVER HURT ANY KIDS BEFORE, BUT I COULDN'T TAKE THE CHANCE...

TILLY STOPPED ME, WANTING TO KNOW WHY? ***WHY?!***

THE CLOSER I GOT TO TILLY EMOTIONALLY, THE MORE I'D SPACE OUT IN BED AND JUST SEE...

...PATTERNS.

I TRIED TO ABUSE HER, LIKE JUDY, BUT SHE WOULDN'T PUT UP WITH IT.

THEN I TRIED TO GET ***HER*** TO ABUSE ***ME.*** BUT SHE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY SOMEONE MUST BE ***HURT*** TO RECEIVE LOVE.

AND WHEN I TRIED TO EXPLAIN...

...I THREW UP.

I BROKE DOWN AND TOLD HER ALL ABOUT CELIA AND JUDY...

...THAT I HAD DUMPED ALL OF MY ANGER FROM WIFE #1 ONTO WIFE #2, AND I COULD ONLY PERFORM WITH "PROPS".

AFTER MAKING HER SWEAR NOT TO LAUGH, I SHOWED HER MY BAG AND PARKA.

SHE SAID

I BET I CAN MAKE YOU FORGET THAT BAG FOR GOOD.

I WANTED TO CRY. NEVER HAD ANYONE TRIED SO HARD...

BUT I JUST COULDN'T HELP IT. FOR HER SAKE, I ACTED EXCITED, BUT INSIDE I CRINGED AND WANTED TO DIE.

MY ONE SOLACE WAS YOU, UNTOUCHED AND UNSPOILED, AS I ONCE WAS. REMEMBER HOW I USED TO GIVE YOU A RIDE ON MY BACK, LIKE A PONY?

IN THE QUIET OF THE NIGHT, TILLY SAID

YOU ACT LIKE YOU WERE ABUSED.

I DIDN'T KNOW.

I TOLD HER ABOUT MY LIVING ALONE WITH MY AUNT, BUT SHE SAID THAT WOMEN ALMOST NEVER ABUSE MEN. IT MUST BE SOMEONE ELSE.

TEARS STARTED TO STREAM DOWN MY FACE, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHY. SHE ASKED

IF YOU KEEP DUMPING ANGER ON EACH NEW WOMAN, WHO DUMPED IT ON *YOU* IN THE *FIRST* PLACE?

I TRIED TO... REMEMBER...

...ONLY GLIMPSES...

THEN I TOLD TILLY ABOUT MY NIGHTMARE OF ABUSING YOU. I THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO SHARE.

BIG MISTAKE.

SHE GOT REAL QUIET. SHE NEVER LOOKED AT ME THE SAME AFTER THAT.

IN HER MIND, I WAS CAPABLE OF INFLICTING THE ABUSE I MIGHT HAVE SUFFERED! IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

THE WEEK AFTER SHE TOOK YOU TO HER MOM'S...

I JUST DON'T FEEL SAFE ANYMORE, ARTIE.

I KNOW YOU LOVE SARA, BUT I CAN'T RISK HER SAFETY. AND IF YOU LOVE HER, YOU'LL AGREE.

TIL-- I...IT'S JUST...

WHAT COULD I SAY? SHE WAS RIGHT. MY NEED TO BE WITH YOU WAS LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE DANGER THAT I'D MESS YOU UP.

ALTHOUGH I'D NEVER MESSED ANYONE ***ELSE*** UP, UNLESS THEY WERE OF CONSENTING AGE.

I KNEW I'D NEVER HURT YOU, BUT I ALSO KNEW THAT TILLY WOULD NEVER SEE THAT.

THE WORST PART WAS THAT LAME STORY OF MY KILLING MYSELF YOUR MOM CAME UP WITH...

...TO SAVE YOU THE PAIN OF THINKING I'D LEFT YOU BEHIND AND RUN OFF.

BUT YOU FELT ABANDONED ANYWAY. THERE'S NO WAY YOUR MOM AND I COULD HAVE SPARED YOU THAT PAIN.

LATER I REMEMBERED ABOUT DEXTER THE BABY SITTER.

THAT'S WHO IT MUST HAVE BEEN. AND HE'S A MALE. IT'S HIS FAULT!

I TOLD TILLY, HOPING WE COULD GO BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS.

SHE JUST SHOOK HER HEAD, SAYING I NEEDED HELP.

I SUNK INTO A SEWER OF SELF-HATRED.

IF YOUR MOTHER THOUGHT I WAS A MONSTER, IF SHE WOULD TAKE AWAY THE ONLY PERSON I COULD FEEL LOVE FOR, THEN I ***WOULD*** BECOME ONE...

...HURTING EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING AROUND ME!

I ALWAYS REMEMBER FEELING THAT WHEN I ATTACKED THOSE WOMEN...

...THAT I WAS REALLY TRYING TO HURT A PART OF MYSELF.

A SMALL PART. A FEMININE PART. A VULNERABLE PART.

IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE WOMEN THEMSELVES. IT WAS A FORM OF SELF-HATRED TURNED OUTWARD...

...THOUGH I'M SURE THIS DISTINCTION WAS POINTLESS TO THEM.

I STILL WATCHED YOU...

...FROM A SAFE...

...DISTANCE.

WATCHING YOU...

...GROW...

...KNOWING THAT, ONE DAY...

...YOU'D RESENT ME FOR LEAVING.

BLAM

UNFORTUNATELY, AFTER MY OUTBACK EXPERIENCES, I FOUND THAT WHILE MY HEAD COULD BE BLOWN OFF....

...I COULDN'T *DIE.* SO I JUST HAD TO SEW IT BACK ON.

WHAT A CRUEL TWIST OF FATE, DENYING DEATH TO A MAN WHO WANTS IT *MOST.*

...BUT THE FACTORY WENT BELLY UP, GIVING ME THE CHANCE TO SNEAK IN AND RECLAIM THOSE ORIGINAL 24 BINS OF MEMORIES AND OUTBACKS TO PLAY IN.

ANYWAY, I WATCHED AS THE PUBLIC STORAGE GARAGES EVENTUALLY CLOSED...

...AND A FACTORY FOR MANUFACTURING JAR RUBBERS WAS BUILT RIGHT ON TOP OF THE ABANDONED STORAGE BINS, WELL, THAT SLOWED DOWN MY OUTBACK TRIPS...

HERE'S HOW IT WORKED, I'D STORED JULIE'S STUFF IN BIN EIGHT, LIKE I TOLD YOU, JUST TO WARM UP....

I PUT *YOUR* OLD TOYS IN SIX, SO I COULD KEEP AN EYE ON YOU, FROM INSIDE, TO MAKE SURE YOU WERE OKAY.

AND EVERYONE ELSE...

...WELL, IMAGINE GOING INTO THE MINDS OF 22 COMPLETE STRANGERS. UNFORTUNATELY, NOT EVERYONE'S *INTERESTING.*

NOBODY HAD ANY *DEEP DARK SECRETS* THAT I'D RECOGNIZE BECAUSE I DIDN'T KNOW THEM *OUTSIDE* THE BINS.

WANDERING THROUGH *THESE* PEOPLE'S UNCONSCIOUS MINDS GOT BORING QUICK.

I GREW CYNICAL, LETTING LITTLE CREATURES FROM JULIE'S MIND COME OVER, FOR KICKS. THEY TURNED *NASTY* OVER HERE, THOUGH, PROVING TO HAVE A DEMENTED SENSE OF HUMOR.

POP

POP

SPLAT

WOOSSSSSS

ZIP

BANG

BUT SITTING THERE IN A BATHROOM FULL OF ISZ, ALL ALONE, HAVING LOST EVERY***ONE*** AND EVERY***THING*** I EVER CARED ABOUT...

...I COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER...

WHAT WAS SO FEARFUL ABOUT SEEING AUNT RUTH AS SHE REALLY WAS?

WHY DO I ONLY REMEMBER CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT HER?

WHY DID THAT CRAP WITH THE BABY SITTER JUST FEEL LIKE THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG?

ONE DAY IT ALL CAME TO A HEAD...

SHE'D DIED. I WAS HER LAST LIVING RELATIVE. HOW PATHETIC.

I COULD'VE FELT A LOTTA THINGS, BUT I MOSTLY FELT TWO THINGS.

IRRATIONAL FEAR...

...AND INCREDIBLE ANGER.

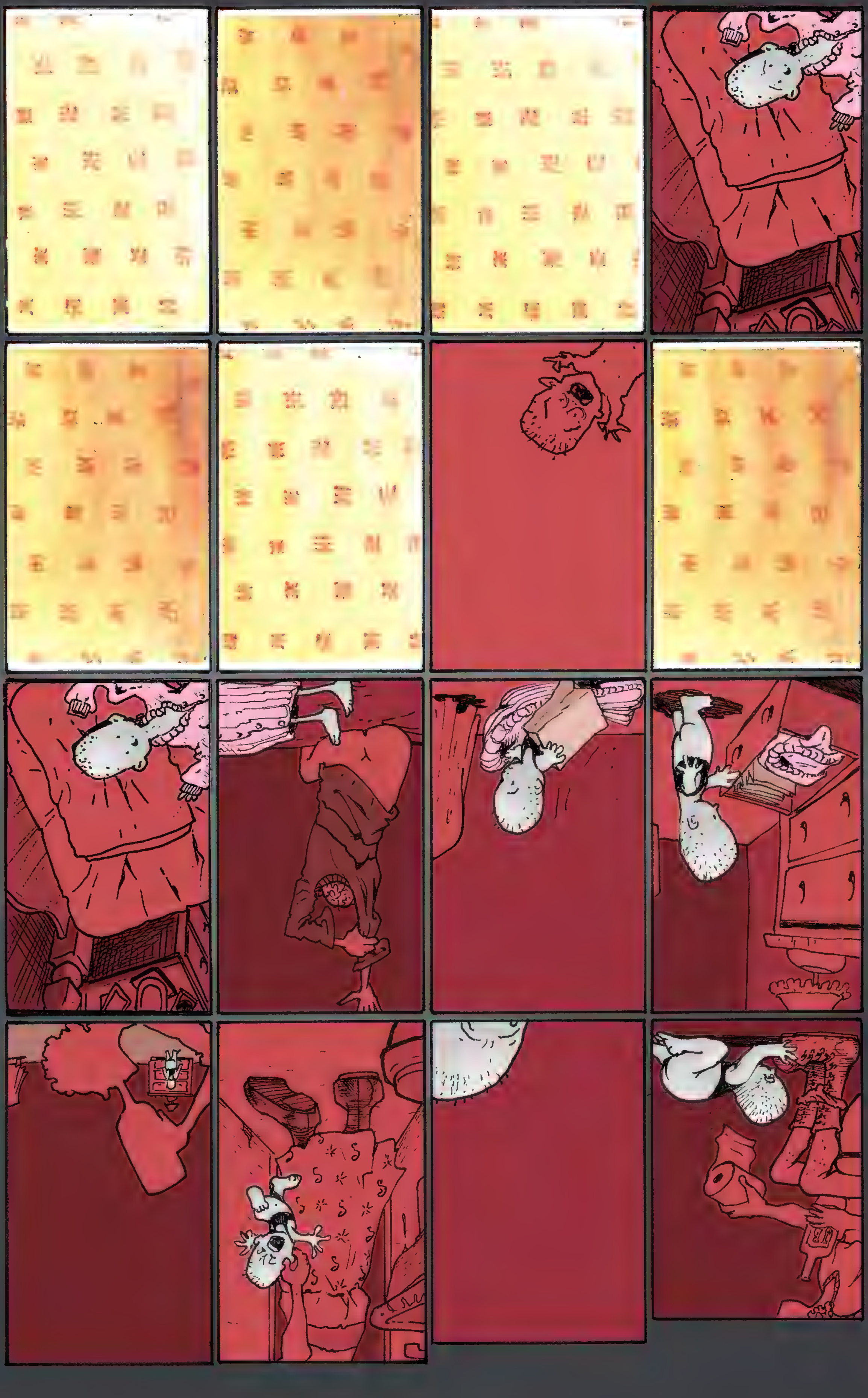
I WENT TO SEE HER...

...BECAUSE I WAS SICK OF...

...BEING AFRAID.

SPIT

AND TO REMEMBER...



...FLOATING...

S'OKAY. JUST LOOK UP...

...AND KEEP FLOATING...

YOU EVER STARE AT SOMETHING FOR SO LONG...

...THAT YOU FORGET *WHY* YOU'RE LOOKING AT IT IN THE FIRST PLACE?

I HEAR HER SHAMEFUL CRYING NOW.

I HUG HER, TO GET HER TO CALM DOWN.

SHE GETS VERY QUIET, TAKING ANOTHER DRINK.

SHE POURS LIQUOR OVER MY HEAD, LAUGHING AT ME.

SHE TELLS ME I'M A NAUGHTY BOY, AND SHOULD BE PUNISHED FOR WHAT...

...I DID TO HER.

THAT ALL MEN ARE PERVERTS.

SHE TELLS ME THAT SHE'LL SEND ME TO JAIL FOR RAPING HER. SHE PICKS UP THE PHONE.

I START CRYING AND SOBBING AGAIN, BEGGING HER NOT TO!

SHE SAYS I'M UGLY AND PERVERTED, BUT SHE LOVES ME ANYWAY. SHE HUGS ME.

SHE SEEMS GENUINELY PUZZLED WHY I'M CRYING, WIPING MY TEARS.

SHE ASKS IF I LIKE LOOKING LIKE A SISSY.

GIGGLING, SHE SAYS ONLY LITTLE GIRLS WEAR PINK PARKAS.

I PROMISE I'LL BE GOOD...

...NOT MAKE HER ANGRY ANYMORE...

...WITHOUT REALLY HAVING THE SLIGHTEST IDEA HOW.

DAMMIT, DADDY...

HONK

...WHY'D YOU LEAVE ME AND MOMMY? I KNOW IF YOU'D'VE KEPT TRYING, SHE WOULD'VE LET YOU COME HOME...

BECAUSE OF YOU, I'LL NEVER TRUST MEN AGAIN.

OKAY, BUT AT LEAST *I'D'VE* KNOWN.

SCREW YOU, ARTIE.

NOT 'CAUSE OF YOUR *CRIMES* OR YOUR FEAR OF *HURTING* ME...

...YOU LEFT.

BECAUSE WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD AND NEEDED YOU THE MOST...

Chapter Three

THE MAX

LISTEN, JULIE. THANKS FOR MEETING ME HERE.

NO PROBLEM, "DAVE." THAT IS WHAT YOU'RE STILL CALLING YOURSELF, ISN'T IT?

LOOK, JUST-- DON'T START! YOU THINK I WANTED TO... COME HERE...

FINE. WHATEVER.

LET ME SAVE YOU SOME TIME. *MARK* SENT YOU, DIDN'T HE? I THOUGHT I'D LOST HIM! PROTECTING THAT BOY IS--

PROTECTING? BY *ABANDONING* HIM?

BUT THE PROTECTION OF A MOTHER'S YOUNG NEVER IS. IF I HADN'T GIVEN THEM TO THAT *"THING,"* MARK WOULD ALREADY BE *DEAD* NOW.

LOOK AT MY HAND...

...NOT VERY PRETTY, IS IT?

LISTEN, *MAXX*...

UH... ACTUALLY, THAT'S DA-

SHUT UP! WHEN YOU GIVE UP PART OF YOURSELF TO SAVE YOUR SON, LOSE EVERYTHING AND EVERY-ONE YOU EVER CARED ABOUT, AND WIND UP LIVING ON THE STREETS TO BOOT, YOU DON'T NEED A G~~A~~S~~H~~ED *DAVE.*

SO TELL ME, WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE MY OUTBACK, "MAXX"?

SO IF I WANNA CALL YOU *MAXX* FOR THE NEXT TWENTY MINUTES, I *THINK* YOU CAN INDULGE ME...OK?

UH... SURE.

UH...

JESUS, I DON'T KNOW WHICH IS MORE PATHETIC, YOU PRETENDING...

...OR ME ASKING.

I JUST CAN'T... REALLY REMEM--

SORRY, DAVE, IT'S JUST BEEN KINDA UGLY LATELY.

YOU'RE NOT THE *FIRST* PERSON TO ASSUME I'VE BEEN NEGLECTING MARK. I CAN SEE HOW YOU MIGHT...

ANYWAY, LONG AGO, SOMEONE *ELSE* DID THE SAME. CPS ALMOST TOOK HIM AWAY BECAUSE OF HER. I *THOUGHT* I COULD TRUST HER. BUT PEOPLE ARE ALL THE SAME.

NOT ALL PEOPLE. *I'M* HERE, FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH.

BUT YOU'RE THE *LAST* PERSON I WANT TO SEE. MARK'S SUPPOSED TO USE *YOU* OR *GONE* FOR A PLACE TO *CRASH*-NOT TO TRACK *ME* DOWN. IF THAT "THING" KNOWS I'M ALIVE, AND MARKS WITH ME...

YEAH. I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN. SO, YOU EVER CONFRONT THAT WOMAN WHO TRIED TO HAVE MARK TAKEN FROM YOU?

THERE WAS NO TIME. I HAD TO GET OUT, AND *FAST!*

YA KNOW, I DON'T DOUBT THE *SINCERITY* OF YOUR INSTINCT TO PROTECT YOUR SON... IT'S JUST THAT *RUNNING AWAY* FROM WHATEVER THREATENS TO TAKE HIM... WHETHER IT BE A "*STRANGE LADY*" YEARS AGO, OR A "*BIG YELLOW THING*" NOW, IT JUST SEEMS...

GUTLESS?

EXHAUSTING! MAYBE WITH SOME HELP YOU COULD TURN AND *FIGHT* FOR A CHANGE? MAYBE--

YEAH, RIGHT, LIKE *YOU* CARE! TEN YEARS OF *NOTHIN'*, AND NOW YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK? BUT IT'S TOO LATE! TO ME, YOU'RE JUST SOME *STRANGER* WHO LOOKS LIKE MAXX.

THAT'S NOT FAIR. I HAD TO TAKE MY OLD LIFE BACK. AND YOU DON'T NEED A *PROTECTOR* ANYMORE, YOU NEED A *FRIEND*. IF YOU WEREN'T SO STUBBORN, YOU'D *SEE* THAT.

HEY, I DON'T NEED THIS--

WAIT.

WHY?

BECAUSE... JUST WAIT, OK?

IF ANY PART OF YOU HAS *ANY* FEELING LEFT FOR ME, THEN PLEASE PROMISE YOU'LL TELL MARK I'M *DEAD*. THAT *THING* MUST'VE COME FROM *MY* OUTBACK, AND IF IT FINDS ME... WELL, OKAY.

BUT I *WON'T* LET IT TAKE MARK DOWN, TOO! GOT IT? HE MAY GROW UP BELIEVING I'VE ABANDONED HIM BY DYING, BUT HE WILL *GROW UP!*

OKAY, I PROMISE.

THANKS. I OWE YA.

I ASSUME YOU'LL BE IN THE SAME PLACE, IF I NEED TO.

UH-HUH. SEE YA.

MAN, WHERE'S NORBERT? I TOLD HIM TO MEET ME HERE. OH, WELL, BACK TO DAD'S STORY...

AFTER ALL I REMEMBERED ABOUT HER ABUSE, I STILL MISSED AUNT RUTH.

GO FIGURE. REDEMPTION IS A FUNNY THING.

ONCE I HEARD A GUY CALL INTO A RADIO TALK-SHOW, TELLING OF HIS BEING ABUSED.

THE RADIO GAVE A HOT-LINE TO CALL.

BUT I COULDN'T.

CLICK

I WOUND UP GOING TO A SHELTER FOR WOMEN ESCAPING ABUSE. IRONIC, CONSIDERING HOW MANY I PUT THERE.

BECAUSE FEMALE ABUSE OF CHILDREN IS SO RARE, THEY DOUBTED MY STORY. I CAN'T BLAME THEM, THOUGH TO THEM I'M PART OF THE PROBLEM! I ASKED...

SO WHERE DO *MEN* WHO WERE ABUSED GO TO GET HELP?

A WOMAN WHO ALSO VOLUNTEERED THERE, OVERHEARD AND STOPPED ME ON THE WAY OUT. SHE TURNED OUT TO BE...

...*GAYNOR!* I INSTANTLY CONNECTED WITH HER. WE MUST'VE TALKED TILL TWO IN THE MORNING. SHE USED TO DATE A MOB BOSS, AND SHE WAS PROBABLY THE ONLY WOMAN WHO'D SEEN MORE GRISLY STUFF THAN ME. SHE WAS ALSO SYMPATHETIC TO ME WITHOUT WANTING TO "FIX" ME.

WE SAW A LOT OF EACH OTHER, AND MY PLUMBING HAD PRETTY MUCH "GIVEN OUT," AND SHE WAS OKAY WITH THAT, SO WAS I, SINCE I WAS SICK OF PAPER BAGS.

BUT THERE WAS STILL EMOTIONAL STUFF. AND ME AND GAYNOR WORKED ON AS MUCH AS WE COULD.

WHEN I TOLD GAYNOR EVERTHING I'D DONE AND BEEN THROUGH, I EXPECTED HER TO LEAVE. SHE DIDN'T. I WAS TESTING HER.

I GUESS AFTER LIVING WITH A GANGSTER, SHE DIDN'T SCARE EASILY.

I REMEMBER THE LAST TIME I TRIED.

I HOPED I COULD JUST CRAWL BACK INTO PUNISHIN AUNT RUTH.

BUT THE ODDEST THING HAPPENED.

ONE MOMENT I WAS STARING AT HER ANGUISHED FACE... THEN I SAW...

...MYSELF.

BEING ABUSED, ALL OVER AGAIN, BY...

...ME.

I LET HER GO, STILL SHAKING... WITH MY REALIZATION.

ALL THOSE YEARS, ALL THOSE WOMEN I'VE BEEN TRYING TO HURT.

SO, ONE NIGHT I WANDERED INTO AN ALLEY, AND FOUND...

...REDEMPTION STARING BACK AT ME.

THE CLOSER I'D GET TO HER, THE MORE I'D WANTED TO SLIP BACK INTO MY "OLD PATTERNS."

I BOARDED UP THE FACTORY FULL OF ISZ, AND SAID GOODBYE TO MR. GONE.

PRETTY STUPID, THINKING I COULD JUST WALK AWAY FROM ALL THE PAIN I CAUSED, JUST LIKE THAT, HUH?

BUT THE SINS OF MR. GONE WOULD HAVE TO RETURN TO HAUNT ARTIMIS PENDER, WOULDN'T THEY? YOU CAN'T OUTRUN YOUR OWN SHADOW.

I DECIDED IF NO ONE ELSE WANTED TO HELP GUYS GET THROUGH THIS ABUSE STUFF, THEN MAYBE I SHOULD.

I THINK I'M GONNA START A GROUP FOR OTHER GUYS WHO'VE BEEN ABUSED, ALSO.

THAT'S COOL. I BET A LOT OF GUYS WOULD COME TO SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

SO I WAS WRONG. AT LEAST ONE GUY STARTED COMING. WE EXCHANGED STORIES.

HE WAS ABUSED BY HIS UNCLE, OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS.

MORE GUYS CAME. AND LIKE ME, MOST BELIEVED IT WAS EITHER "NO BIG DEAL," OR THAT THEY "BROUGHT THE ABUSE ON THEMSELVES."

I FOUND OUT I WASN'T THE *ONLY* ONE WHO "*WATCHED PATTERNS*" OR BECAME *ILL* AT THE THOUGHT OF "*MAKING LOVE.*" THERE WERE *SO MANY* OF US, IT WAS ALMOST A CLICHÉ.

BUT. MY INABILITY TO *TRUST* ANYONE WASN'T A CLICHÉ. IT WAS A *FACT.* AND I STILL *SAW AUNT RUTH'S FACE* IN EVERY WOMAN I LOOK AT.

NO WONDER I FEAR THEM.

LOATH THEM...

...NEED THEM.

BUT I DIDN'T CARE ANYMORE.

EVERY STORY BROUGHT ME A SMALL STEP CLOSER...

...TO NO LONGER BEING ABLE TO IGNORE...

Z

...MY OWN PERSONAL BULLSHIT.

AFTER ALL I'D BEEN THROUGH, I STILL REFUSED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR RAPING THOSE WOMEN.

IT WAS STILL "ALL AUNT RUTH'S FAULT."

KID, WE'VE GOT TO TALK.

YOU SEE MY MOM?

YEAH... WELL, YES AND NO. YA SEE, THE TRUTH IS...

SCREECH

MARK, DAVE, GET IN. I'LL EXPLAIN LATER.

I KNOW THIS GUY. HE WAS MR. "SOMETHING OR OTHER"? WHAT WAS IT?

AND I THOUGHT HE WAS DENSE AS A RABBIT!

NO TIME FOR THE PAST "DAVE." WE'VE GOT TO GET TO SARA, AND QUICK!

WHY?

WAIT, DAVE, WHAT ABOUT MY MOM? SHE'S NOT HURT OR ANYTHING, IS SHE, DAVE?

...DAVE?

RRRR

HER NAME WAS *GLORIE*, I BELIEVE. SHE MUST'VE BEEN A TEEN-AGER WHEN I CORNERED HER IN THAT LAUNDRO-MAT. SHE LOOKS IN HER MID-TWENTIES NOW. I WAS IN THE PROCESS OF CONTACTING ALL OF MY FORMER VICTIMS, ASKING FOR ABSOLUTION.

THERE WAS ALWAYS AN UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCE, IN WHICH THEY REMEMBERED WHO I WAS.

GLORY JUST LOOKED AT ME BLANKLY.

I GAVE HER MY NUMBER, IF SHE EVER WANTED TO SAY ANYTHING TO ME... TO YELL, CRY, ANYTHING.

SHE JUST TOOK IT AND CLOSED THE DOOR.

MOST WERE LIKE MY EX-WIFE, PATTY, WHO WAS SUSPICIOUS OF WHY I'D RETURNED AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.

I TOLD HER I WANTED FORGIVENESS FOR ALL I'D DONE.

BUT LIKE WITH SO MANY OTHER WOMEN I'D CONTACTED, IT WAS...

...TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE.

A FEW MONTHS LATER, I WAS SURPRISED TO SEE...

...GLORIE. SHE ASKED IF I *REALLY* WANTED TO HEAR WHAT SHE HAD TO SAY? I SAID...SURE.

SHE LET ME HAVE IT. TEN YEARS OF RAGE LOCKED DOWN INSIDE.

THERE WAS NO WAY TO GET IT OUT IN ONE SITTING. SO SHE'D COME OVER, YELL AT ME, THEN WE'D BREAK FOR LUNCH, SAYING NOTHING, THEN SHE'D START UP AGAIN.

MUNCH MUNCH

MUNCH

WE CONTINUED FOR WEEKS THAT WAY.

SLAP

SPIT

SHE FINALLY STOPPED COMING ALTOGETHER...

SLAM

...I GUESS HAVING WORKED THROUGH SOMETHING.

WITH GAYNOR, I GOT INTO THE IDEA OF "WOMAN AS HEALER."

IT WAS VERY ROMANTIC TO THINK THAT ONLY SHE COULD BE "LOVER/THERAPIST" ENOUGH TO SAVE ME.

BUT SHE DIDN'T WANT THE JOB, SHE SAID SHE HAD HER *OWN* PROBLEMS WITHOUT SOLVING *MINE*. SHE WANTED A FRIEND.

GAYNOR HAD A TICKLING FETISH. SHE NEEDED FEATHERS. AT LEAST HERS WAS A POLITICALLY CORRECT FETISH. NO ONE GOT HURT.

I HAD A BREAKDOWN AND REALIZED THAT NO ONE HAD TO BE *HURT*...

...TO MAKE LOVE.

I SUDDENLY SAW MYSELF FLOATING.

FLOATING AWAY FROM EVERYTHING I THOUGHT I WAS.

I KNEW IT WOULDN'T LAST, BUT IT WAS NICE. IT WAS...

...A START.

I TOLD GAYNOR I USED TO HAVE SICK PERVERSIONS, BUT NOW I ONLY WANTED TO MAKE LOVE NATURALLY.

SHE SAID IF I WASN'T CAREFUL, I'D TAKE ALL THE FUN OUT OF SEX. SHE *WANTED* IT NAUGHTY. SHE SAID, "DON'T CHANGE TOO MUCH, ARTIE. SAINTS MAKE FOR CRAPPY LOVERS."

YEARS LATER, I RETIRED FROM COUNSELING AND MOVED INTO A TRAILER WITH GAYNOR. I DID SOME CHECKING AND FOUND OUT MANY OF THE WOMEN I'D ATTACKED...

...HAD BEEN ABUSED AS CHILDREN. I'D VISITED THE OUTBACKS OF THE ADULTS WHO'D ABUSED THEM.

YEARS LATER, WHEN GLORIE SHOWED UP AGAIN, I REALIZED *WHY* SHE'D HIT ME SO HARD.

IT WASN'T JUST ME SHE WAS HITTING BACK.

I DON'T KNOW WHY SHE CHOSE *ME* TO TELL. OR WHY I CAME TO TELL HER THINGS I'VE NEVER TOLD *ANY* WOMAN. NOT EVEN GAYNOR.

YOU KNOW, I THINK ABOUT HIM SOMETIMES, MY DAD.

I KNOW... SAME WITH AUNT RUTH.

I WISH HE WERE HERE RIGHT NOW. I'D PRETEND HE WAS THE SIZE OF THIS WORM.

YEAH? WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

:OUCH: THAT'S GOTTA HURT.

NOT HALF AS MUCH AS WHAT HE PUT *ME* THROUGH.

AMEN.

TOO BAD IT'S JUST PRETEND, HUH?

YEAH. TOO BAD.

SHE WHAT? SHE *CAN'T* BE DEAD.

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU!

NEITHER DO I. THE JULIE WINTERS I KNOW WO--

BUTT OUT, PENCIL NECK! THIS IS BETWEEN ME AND THE KID.

LOOK, LET ME SAVE YOU THE SPEECH. *MOM* PUT YOU UP TO THIS, HUH? SHE'S GOT SOME STUPID THING GOING ABOUT A *BIG YELLOW MONSTER* THAT SHE'S GOT TO PROTECT ME FROM!

ONLY IT'S JUST ANOTHER *EXCUSE* TO DITCH ME. SHE ALWAYS FINDS SOME REASON TO TAKE OFF! LITTLE BLUE MEN, THIS, THAT, WHATEVER! SAME OLD CRAZY MOM!! WHY COULDN'T I HAVE A NORM--

HEY! SHE'S TRYING TO PROTECT YOU, MARK! YOU MAY THINK SHE'S TOUCHED--

--BUT SOMETHING MADE HER SCARED ENOUGH TO SEND YOU TO US.

YEAH, SURE. THE FACT SHE'S NUTS.

HANG IN THERE, BUDDY. YOU'LL SEE. SO, GONE, WHERE'D YOU SAY WE'RE GOING, AND WHY THE RUSH?

YOU, "DAVE," ARE THE LEAST IMPORTANT PART OF THE EQUATION, CONSIDERING YOUR LINK WITH JULIE'S BEEN BROKEN AND I OWE YOU NO EXPLANATION OF WHERE WE'RE GOING?

PISSY LITTLE GUY, AIN'T HE?

HOWEVER, I WILL TELL *MARK*. WHATEVER YOU MAY THINK OF YOUR MOTHER, YOUNG FELLOW, SHE *ISN'T* CRAZY.

NOT COMPLETELY, ANYWAY.

THERE HAS BEEN *SOMETHING* WHICH IS KILLING PEOPLE AROUND TOWN! AND YOUR *MOTHER* IS ON *THE LIST!* WE HAVE TO GET TO HER BEFORE *IT* DOES!

BUT WE NEED HELP.

BIG TIME! THERE'S ONLY *ONE PERSON* WITH ENOUGH POWER TO HELP US RIGHT NOW--

WHO?

LET'S SEE. GETTING BACK TO OUR LITTLE STORY, OF DADDY TURNING INTO A SWELL GUY WHO JUST HAPPENED TO RAPE WOMEN AND TURN MEN INTO BUGS...

OKAY, SO MAYBE I HAVEN'T BEEN COMPLETELY HONEST.

NOT THAT I'VE CONSCIOUSLY *LIED* OR ANYTHING. IT'S JUST...WELL, MY STORY HAS BENT OVER BACKWARDS TO SHOW...

WELL, WHO'S *NOT* GOING TO HAVE SYMPATHY FOR AN ABUSED CHILD, RIGHT?

HERE'S MY PROBLEM. A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE ABUSED AS KIDS! IT DOESN'T GIVE ***THEM*** THE RIGHT TO GO OUT AND... AND, WELL...

...DO WHAT I DID.

ON A PHILOSOPHIC LEVEL, I AM ***REPULSED*** BY WHAT I'VE DONE, OR EVEN IF A VIOLENT THOUGHT POPS INTO MY MIND I'M SICKENED TO VOMMITING, HONEST.

BUT, PHYSICALLY, IT FEELS ***SOOO*** GOOD! ESPECIALLY WHEN I'M NOT *SUPPOSED* TO *DO IT!* PURE ANIMAL LUST! MALE OR FEMALE! IT'S GREAT, ISN'T IT?

SOMETIMES, I'M SURE A DARK PART OF MYSELF, CAPABLE OF HURTING OTHERS, IS THE ONLY HONEST PART LEFT. MY DARK, SHADOWED SELF!

WHEW! IT TAKES A LOT OUT OF YOU. :Sigh:

PANT PANT

PANT PANT PANT

BUT MY DESTRUCTIVE SHADOW IS FULL OF BULL, TOO. IT HAS ITS DARK "AX TO GRIND."

I GUESS I'LL JUST HAVE TO ACCEPT BOTH GOOD AND EVIL AS PART OF MY COLLECTIVE FAMILY.

BUT, WAIT--IT'S NOT WORKING!

I'M GETTING SUCKED INTO THE SHADOW!

HEEEL...

SEE?!! YOU *CAN'T* ASSIMILATE THE EVIL! THERE'LL ALWAYS BE A DARK PART OF MY SOUL WHERE WOMEN ARE ★@%!!:;★ AND LITTLE KIDS ARE JUST ASKING FOR IT! ESPECIALLY *ME!*

NOW I'M EVEN SCARING *MYSELF!* WHAT KIND OF A *MONSTER* WOULD THINK A CHILD CAPABLE OF CARNAL THOUGHTS!

THE KIND THAT CAN'T FORGIVE HIMSELF.

WHEN AUNT RUTH USED TO "PUNISH ME, I WOULD BECOME EXCITED IT WAS MY OWN FAULT.

I DON'T KNOW WHY, AND I KNOW I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE *TOO YOUNG* TO BE EVEN *ABLE* TO...

...BUT I DID. I'M SO ASHAMED, I COULD DIE. I CAN FORGIVE MYSELF, NOW.

BUT I JUST CAN'T FORGIVE ...THAT LITTLE BOY I WAS.

I KNOW. I KNOW. UNLESS I FORGIVE *THAT* BOY, I'LL NEVER BE REDEEMED.

BECAUSE *I'M* THAT BOY! *GET* IT? I'M *HIM!* *IRONIC,* HUH?

JUST REMEMBER SARA, REDEMPTION IS NOT FOR WHIMPS.

GEEZ, NORBERT, WHERE WERE YOU?

SORRY, THE YELLOW PAINT I USED ON MY MASK KEEPS FADING.

WHAT DOES "REDEMPTION FOR WHIMPS" MEAN?

NEVER MIND. I GOT A MESSAGE THAT GONE WANTED US TO MEET HIM HERE. IN FACT, HE SHOULD BE--

click

I CAN'T BELIEVE I USED TO DRESS LIKE THIS GUY.

SARA, THIS IS MARK WINTERS. HIS MOTHER SENT HIM HERE FOR HELP IN STOPPING IAGO.

WHAT EE-AUG-OH?

HI, MARK. HELLO, MAXX.

HI.

NOT YOU, STUPID.

WHICH IS?

KICK BIG UGLY'S ASS!

THIS IS NO JOKE, SARA. WHETHER YOU BELIEVE IT OR NOT, EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED UP TO THIS POINT, MOVING OBJECTS, OPENING FAERIES FOR CLUES, ALL TEST STRENGTHENING YOU FOR *THIS* TASK

SARA, EVEN IF YOU'RE TOO LATE TO MAKE AMENDS WITH *JULIE*, THEN PERHAPS... FOR HER *SON*?

YOU'RE THE FOCAL POINT, SARA, THE FAIRIES, IAGO. YOUR MAXX, IT'S JUST THIS ONE PART HAS GROWN OUT OF CONTROL AND THREATENS TO DESTROY EVERY-THING OVER *HERE*~

WAIT-- LET ME GUESS. UNLESS *I* DEAL WITH IT OVER THERE? IN *MY* SUPPOSED OUTBACK?

FORGET IT. WHO NEEDS HER? I KNOW THIS SARA'S THE ONE--

--WHO TRIED TO HAVE ME TAKEN FROM MOM WHEN I WAS LITTLE.

BESIDES, IT'S TOO LATE. MOM'S DEAD.

WELL, ACTUALLY... NO, SHE'S NOT.

I KNEW IT! I COULD FEEL SHE WAS ALIV- OH, GREAT--THERE GOES MY HAND AGAIN.

SORRY, MARK, BUT SHE WAS TRYING TO PROTECT YOU.

OKAY, SO LET'S GO GET MOM AND STOP THIS THING!

AT THIS POINT, I DON'T HAVE A CLUE HOW TO STOP HIM.

I DO. MARK, I PROMISE--

YEAH, YEAH, BLAH-BLAH-BL-

LISTEN, YOU LITTLE SQUIRT! EVERYONE ELSE MAY HAVE LET YOU DOWN, BUT NOT ME! DESPITE WHAT YOU THINK, I CALLED THE AUTHORITIES BECAUSE I CARE FOR YOU-AND YOUR MOM. AND, UNLIKE HER, I DON'T MAKE PROMISES I CAN'T KEEP.

I'LL SAVE HER.

IT'S COMING FOR ME. AS I KNEW IT WOULD. AT LEAST MARK WILL BE SPARED. DAVE WILL WATCH HIM. I KNEW THERE WAS SOME "MAXX" LEFT IN DAVE.

FUNNY, I THOUGHT I'D BE MORE FRIGHTENED, NOW THAT I'M ABOUT TO...TO...

NOT TIME TO DIE YET! HERE'S A THOUGHT. TIME TO RETURN TO DREAMTIME! LOVE SWEET JULIE.

WHOOOSH!

ARE YOU SURE THIS IS THE PLACE, MAXX?

THAT'S *DAVE*, AND YES, SHE SAID TO MEET HER *HERE!*

OKAY, GUYS, STAND BACK--THIS COULD GET UGLY! THIS IS BETWEEN A GIRL AND HER SLUG!

WE'RE TOO LATE! HE'S GOT HER!

I DON'T THINK SO, MARK. IF IAGO HAD KILLED JULIE, HE'D JUST WAIT FOR US TO GET HERE.

I THINK HE TOOK HER SOMEWHERE TO GOAD US INTO FOLLOWING...

YEAH, BUT THE QUESTION IS...

...WHERE?

Chapter

Four

Pool of Tears

I DON'T SEE WHY WE HAVE TO WAIT *OUTSIDE* THESE OLD STORAGE BINS, WHILE SARA AND GONE DO *GOD-KNOWS-WHAT* INSIDE!

AND WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO WITH SAVING MY MOM FROM THAT SLUG?

MARK, ONLY *SARA* CAN SAVE JULIE, AND ONLY *GONE* CAN GUIDE HER INTO HER OWN *PANGAEA!* THAT'S WHY HE SENT DAVE HOME. WHEN GONE'S READY FOR US TO JOIN THEM, AND FOR *ME* TO RETURN *HOME*... ...HE'LL *GET* US!

GOD ARTIE, I FEEL LIKE SUCH AN *IDIOT* SITTING HERE LIKE THIS..

I KNOW. BUT TRUST ME - DRESSING AS A *BABY* AND *REGRESSING*, SURROUNDED BY YOUR *OLD TOYS* IS THE ONLY WAY FOR YOU TO *WITNESS YOUR OWN OUTBACK.*

SO WHY DO I HAVE TO SIT *NAKED* ON THIS PAGE FROM *ALICE IN WONDE-*

WE USED TO *READ* IT TO YOU AS A BABY-IT MADE YOU FEEL *SAFE*. POPULATING *YOUR* OUTBACK WITH *ITS* CHARACTERS SHOULD HELP PROTECT YOU FROM *IAGO.*

SO I'M SAVING JULIE BY CURLING UP AND SUCKING MY THUMB LIKE SOME WIMP, IN SOME ABANDONED PUBLIC STORAGE BIN, NAKED, WITH YOU?

"JUMP STARTING" YOUR LEFT HAND *WILL* HELP *YOU* DEFEAT EVERYTHING PHONEY ABOUT YOURSELF, SYMBOLIZED BY IAGO. AND YOU'RE NOT *NAKED*..

...YOU'VE GOT THE *CAP!* JUST RELAX. NOBODY WILL *HURT* YOU, AND NOBODY'S *JUDGING* YOU. REMEMBER...

.. YOU'RE HERE TO SAVE *YOURSELF.*

NOT JUST JULIE.

NOW, WHAT DO YOU SEE?

I'M OUTSIDE A CIRCULAR SET OF CAVES, THEY KIND OF LOOK LIKE-

THE STORAGE BIN WE'RE IN RIGHT NOW?

YEAH, EXCEPT I'M A LITTLE KID, IN PINK UNDERWEAR.

LIL' SARA. PERFECT - *NOW* WHAT DO YOU SEE?

WELL, *DUH* IT'S A *WHITE RABBIT!* A *FAST* WHITE RABBIT. IT'S HEADED TOWARD A HOLE IN THE GROUND.

REMEMBER SARA, IF YOU'RE IN DANGER, AND THE PRINCESS CAN STRIKE THE GROUND WITH YOUR TOY *STICK-HORSE*, NORBERT AND THE STICK HORSE CAN TRADE PLACES AND NORBERT CAN HELP YOU. WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?

I'M FOLLOWING "WHITIE". HOW COME I CAN HEAR YOUR VOICE?

OUR ONLY HOPE OF CUTTING THROUGH THE ILLUSIONS IN YOUR MIND IS OUR PSYCHIC LINK. HOPEFULLY YOUR TRIP DOWN--

SPLAT!

- WON'T BREAK IT -

GONE? ARTIE?

...DADDY?

WELL, SO MUCH FOR MY "GUIDE". I GUESS I'M ....ALONE.

COOL! MY *HORSIE*.

YOU'RE NEVER ALONE WITH *ME*, LITTLE ONE.

DON'T I *KNOW* YOU?

I'M THE *PRINCESS* OF THIS *CASTLE OF QUILTS*, BUT I AM *LOST*- LOOKING FOR A WAY TO THE SURFACE. WHO MIGHT YOU BE?

EVERYONE IN PANGAEA IS THIRSTY, DRIVEN UNDERGROUND, LOOKING FOR WATER. IT IS SAID, ONE DAY A *STRANGER* WILL COME,

AND CRY A *POOL OF TEARS*, FILLING PANGAEA WITH *FRESH WATER* TO *BREATHE*. BUT IF THEY DO NOT COME SOON - I FEAR WE'LL ALL DIE A SLOW, DRY DEATH.

WOW, BUMMER.

LISTEN TO YOUR MOTHER, SARA, YOU SHOULD YOU SHOULD YOU SHOULD YOU

HERE, SARA, LET'S PARTY, I WANT I WANT I WANT

I'M LIL' SARA. I'M SUPPOSED TO... UH...ACTUALLY I FORGOT WHAT I'M SUPPOSED TO DO... BUT IT'S SOMPIN IMPORTANT, I'M SURE.

GEE, I'M GETTING THIRSTY, ARE YOU?

WHO ARE THEY?

SHOULD..

WANT.. WANT..

THEY'RE THE *"YOU SHOULD, I WANT* FAIRIES". THEY'RE HARMLESS AS LONG AS I KEEP THEM TIED TO MY HAIR, AND OUT OF MY HEAD. COME ALONG LIL' SARA, WE MUST GET HOME.

DO THEY EVER SHUT UP?

UNFORTUNATELY, ...NO.

LOOKIE! A *TABLE* WITH A *KEY!* THIS MEANS SOMETHING, BUT I FORGET *WHAT*...

PERHAPS IT OPENS ONE OF THE DOORS BEHIND THE QUILT.

DRINK ME

IT MIGHT FIT THIS DOOR, BUT WE'RE TOO BIG TO GO *THROUGH!* THIS ALL SEEMS SO *FAMILIAR*...

THAT BOTTLE WASN'T HERE *BEFORE!* IT MIGHT BE UNSAFE, BUT MY THIRST IS TOO GREAT!

ME, TOO. LET'S DRINK IT.

I WANT DRINK. I WANT. WANT.

SHOULDN'T! UNSAFE! SHOULDN'T!

WELL...THAT STUFF MADE US SHORT ENOUGH TO *FIT* THROUGH THE *DOOR*..

..BUT TOO *SHORT* TO GRAB THE KEY. WE COULD CLIMB THE LEGS...

NOW I REMEMBER. THAT'S WHY IT'S GLASS, SO IT'S TOO SLIPPERY TO CLIMB. NOW WE EAT THE *CAKE*.

DRINK

GOODNESS, NOW WE'RE TOO *LARGE!* MAYBE YOU COULD SAVE US SOME *TIME* AND REMEMBER SOME OF THIS BEFOREHAND.

OH, YEAH ...SORRY.

WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE SAVING SOMEBODY. HEY, IT'S THAT - *RABBIT!*

DON'T WORRY, I'LL PROTECT YOU!

WE SHOULD, WE SHOULD!

ULP.

MORE *EARTH* AND *MUD* FLOODS OUR QUILT TUNNEL. WE MUST *RUN!*

LET'S FOLLOW THE RABBIT!

DON'T FOLLOW THE RABBIT SARA, IT WILL LEAD YOU IN *CIRCLES!*

THERE'S NO TIME, IT'S TOO LATE! WE'RE DROWNING IN *EARTH!*

ALL FOR THE LACK OF A *STRANGER'S TEARS!*

IS THIS MUD?

EEP!

I SURE DON'T *SMELL* LIKE MUD! HEY, WHERE'D SHE GO? WHO CARES, I'M FALLING TO MY...

OOOFF!

SPLAT!

HEY! ISN'T THIS WHERE I CAME IN? I'M GETTING SICK OF GOING SPLAT! SAY, WHAT'S THAT...

....RUMBLING....

...SOUND?

OH GREAT- *THIS* AGAIN!? *MORE* MUD???

IT'S COMING FROM *YOU* LIL' SARA. I BELIEVE YOU ARE THE STRANGER THE LEGEND SPOKE OF, ONLY INSTEAD OF *TEARS*, YOU'LL FILL THE OUTBACK WITH *FOUL SMELLING MUD!*

BUT I'M *NOT* CRYING MUD, PROMISE!

HUSH CHILD, THOUGH YOU MEAN NO HARM, YOU *ARE* THE SOURCE, I AM *SURE*. AT LEAST WE'VE REACHED THE *SURFACE!*

HEY, THE RABBIT WENT BACK DOWN -

DON'T LOOK!

@X#% HER, I WANNA *LOOK!*

SHOULDN'T LOOK! SHOULDN'T -

BUT IF YOU LOOK BACKWARDS YOU'LL BE....

..RIGHT WHERE YOU *STARTED!*

I'M VERY *DISAPPOINTED* IN YOU SARA, YOU *SHOULDN'T HAVE* LOOKED.

SHE CAN *@X#% OFF!* WHEN YOU GOTTA *LOOK*, YOU GOTTA LOOK! RIGHT?

THE "WANT FAIRIE'S" GOT A *DIRTY MOUTH!*

OH SARA, WHEN WILL YOU LEARN TO IGNORE THE FAIRIES, AND LOOK PAST THE RABBIT!?

I KNOW!

SAY, WHAT'S THAT RUMBLING?

I DID IT! BOY, NOT LOOKING AT THAT RABBIT WAS AS HARD AS TRYING *NOT* TO THINK OF *PINK ELEPHANTS!*

HEY -THE GROUND'S LIKE ONE BIG *QUILT* - BUT THEN HOW CAN WE *PLOW* THROUGH IT LIKE DIRT?!?

I WANT HER TO *SHUT UP!*

SHE REALLY SHOULD.

HUSH YOU TWO. COME ALONG LIL' SARA.

BBROOOOMMM

OH MY! IT'S AN EARTH WHALE!

A BIG ONE.

OR MAYBE WE'RE JUST TOO *SMALL*. I FORGET. WOW, LOOK AT 'EM SPLASH INTO THE WATER - I MEAN, ...UH.. *GROUND!*

YES, WHEN THE AIR IS FILLED WITH WATER, THEY COME UP FROM THE EARTH FOR A DRINK, BUT NOW ALL THEY TASTE IS DRY AIR. THE OUTBACK'S DESPARATE FOR FLUIDS! MAYBE THEIR SUFFERING WILL DRAW THE TEARS WE NEED FROM YOU. DOES IT MAKE YOU CRY?

NOPE. SORRY.

WHUNNGGG

TAKE A LOOK UNDERNEATH THE GROUND AT THEM. MAYBE THAT WILL HELP YOU WEEP!

BUT I DON'T WANNA "WEEP". I'M SORRY EVERYTHING'S *DRIED OUT*, BUT I STILL THINK SOMEBODY ELSE HAS TO CRY. I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TEARS FOR THE WHOLE...

HEY! CAN YOU HEAR ME? OKAY, I'LL JUST FOLLOW YOU IN!

I WISH THE WHALES COULD GET A DRINK. I DON'T WANT 'EM TO DIE!

WOW.

I THINK YOU'RE RIGHT LIL' SARA, THESE EARTH WHALES *ARE* TOO BIG!

WHICH MEANS *WE'RE* TOO SMALL!

RIGHT!

HEY, YOU'RE BIG - THAT CAKE YOU ATE MADE YOU GROW.

BUT NOW I THINK WE'RE TOO BIG.

WHO CARES. PUT ME DOWN, I WANT SOME CAKE!

WOW. IT REALLY WORKS. I'M BIG AGAIN, OR NORMAL, OR WHATEVER.

I'M SORRY 'BOUT THE EARTH WHALES. I PROMISE I'LL TRY TO *CRY*, OKAY?

NO, IT WAS MY MISTAKE. YOUR SHOULDERS ARE TOO NARROW TO BE CARRYING ALL OF THAT. WHEN IT'S TIME, YOU'LL *FLOOD* THE WHOLE OF PANGAEA WITH *SALTY OCEANS* OF AIR TO BREATHE.

NOW LET'S SEE. I'M SUPPOSED TO BE RESCUING SOMEONE NAMED JULIE.

SAY, THEM FAIRIES ARE PRETTY QUIET.

THANKFULLY. SOMETIMES THEY SLEEP.

WHERE TO NOW? WOAW! WHO'S THAT?

IT'S *DEE* AND *DUMB*. TWIN SISTERS WHO DENY THAT EACH OTHER EXISTS. ONE *LOVES* THE TASTE OF WATER AND *OVER DRINKS*, WHILE THE OTHER IS *REPULSED* BY IT, AND *STARVES* HERSELF.

LET'S ASK HER IF SHE KNOWS WHO JULIE IS, AND HOW TO FLOOD AN OUTBACK.

WHO'S JULIE?

YES LITTLE GIRL, I HEARD YOU,...

BUT I'M AFRAID I DON'T KNOW *EITHER*... YOUR JULIE OR A PLACE TO DRINK.

LET ME UP! I CAN TELL YOU, IF YOU TURN HER OVER...

IT'S HER TWIN SISTER, PERHAPS SHE *DOES* KNOW...

LET'S TURN HER OVER AND SEE...

WAIT! STOP!!! SHE *LIES!* SHE'LL SAY *ANYTHING* TO BE ON TOP.

I HATE HER. SHE'S *REPULSIVE* AND *UNCOOTH!* SHE ENJOYS EATING WITH *LURID PASSION.* THAT MUST BE *STOPPED!* SHE HAS ALL THE FUN. DON'T!!!

IN FACT, LITTLE "MISS GOODY TWO SHOES" IS STARVING *BOTH OF US!* I HATE HER. SHE'S *PRISSY* AND *NEUROTIC!* SHE'S AFRAID OF EATING WITH -

WELL, IT'S ABOUT *TIME!* I THOUGHT I'D *SUFFOCATE* UNDER THERE! SHE'S NOT *MY* SISTER YOU KNOW.

PLEASE, I *HAVE* NO SISTER, JUST TALK TO *ME*, SHE CAN'T HELP YOU!!!

YOU'RE STARTING TO SOUND LIKE *HER.*

OH GOODNESS. NOT THAT.

OK, TELL US HOW TO FILL THE OUTBACK WITH WATER!

YEAH, YOU SAID YOU KNEW...

WHO'S JULIE?

YES LITTLE GIRL, I HEARD YOU...

I THINK THIS IS WHERE WE CAME *IN*...

LET ME UP. I KNOW HER!

TALK ABOUT A YO-YO DIET.

THOSE ARE TWO WACKY GALS, I WISH THEY COULD GET ALONG.

I KNOW

I WONDER WHO "JULIE" IS? I THINK IT MATTERS...

UNFORTUNATELY, WE'RE NO CLOSER TO FILLING THE OUTBACK WITH *TEARS* THAN BEFORE!

MAYBE THIS DUDE KNOWS SOMPIN? I'D SWEAR I'VE SEEN HIM BEFORE.

YOU *"PUMPKIN"*?

YES! THAT'S ME. I'M A "CHESHIRE PUMPKIN".

NO SILLY, I MEAN YOUR *NAME* - OH NEVER MIND. LISTEN...

WE'RE LOOKING FOR ENOUGH TEARS TO FILL THE OUTBACK WITH WATER.

WELL YOU COULD ASK THE *CATERPILLAR* OVER *THERE*, OR HUNDREDS OF THIRSTY *FAIRIES* EATING THE HORIZON OVER *THERE*, ASK EITHER! *BOTH* ARE MAD.

MAD?

NUTS! INSANE! TOUCHED! EVERYONE *HERE* IS! THIRST HAS DRIVEN US MAD.

NOW I REMEMBER!

JULIE'S THIS CRAZY *WOMAN* I USED TO KNOW, AND A BIG SLUG'S GOT HER.

YOU MEAN *CATERPILLAR*! OVER *THERE*! HE'S VERY *SHY*, BUT IF YOU WANDER OVER, HE MIGHT EVENTUALLY *SHOW UP*, AND HELP YOU FIND YOUR FRIEND, OR *CRY* TRYING.

WHY SHOULD WE BELIEVE A MAD *"PUMPKIN-CAT"*?

BECAUSE THE *CHESHIRE PUMPKIN* ALWAYS SPEAKS THE *TRUTH*.

THE TRUTH THE WAY *YOU* SEE IT. *YOU'RE* MAD!

ABSOLUTE TRUTH IN *PANGAEA*? THE PRINCESS SHOULD KNOW PANGAEA'S ABOUT PERSONAL TRUTHS.

DADDY! LOOK PRINCESS, IT'S HIM!

WAIT -

DADDY - I THOUGHT YOU LEFT ME AND MOMMY! BUT YOU'RE HERE!

THERE'S MY LIL' GIRL! COME TAKE A BITE OUTTA OL' DAD, HE IS THE EDIBLE KIND!

NO!

MUSTN'T EAT! POISON.

GO FOR IT, KID. PARTY DOWN.

IT'S NOT THE *REAL KING*, SARA, IT'S ONLY A *CATERPILLAR'S TRICK!*

BUT -BUT - HE'S A BIG WARM MUSHROOM.

LISTEN TO YOUR HEART SARA, DON'T BE FOOLED -

DADDY... CAN'T LOSE HIM..... I WON'T....

...DADDY

IT'S THE *CATERPILLAR* IN *DISGUISE.*

NO KIDDING. WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST CLUE?

SO MUCH FOR A "CAT'S TRUTH".

DADDY, HELP.

COME BACK PRINCESS, DADDY *NEEDS* YOU!

THE CAT SPEAKS TRUE! THE GIRL MUST ORALLY ***EAT THROUGH*** AND ***DIGEST*** HER FOE, FOR ONLY BY ***INTEGRATING*** HER ***REJECTED SELF*** SHALL SHE BE ***WHOLE***. TAKE A ***BITE***, KID.

BUT IT'S ***POISON!*** SHE'LL DIE. WE MUST ***DESTROY*** EVIL.

LOOK. OUT THERE. THE FAIRIES EAT THE HORIZON, BUT SOMETHING'S ***NOT BEING FED***. THE SISTERS DEE AND DUMB DRINK, BUT NO ONE'S ***THIRST*** IS ***QUENCHED***.

DESPERATE WHALES DRINK ***DRY EARTH***, POINTLESSLY! WHY?

BECAUSE.... ***SUSTENANCE*** CAN'T COME ONLY FROM ***OUTSIDE*** - IT MUST COME FROM EITHER ***TEARS*** OR ***WOMB WATER*** - ***INSIDE***.

EXACTLY! THE ***GIRL'S*** TEARS.

SO EATING THE MUSHROOM WILL MAKE HER ***CRY***?

NO, BUT SOMETHING ELSE WILL - WATCH!

SARA! BE CAREFUL.

C'MON SWEETIE...

DADDY!

JUST A LITTLE CLOSER...

I-LUUV-OO-*TOO*!

THERE! **GOT** YOU. DADDY'S ALL THE WOMB YOU'LL EVER NEED!

I-WUV-OO-DADDY.

IF ANY HARM BEFALLS HER, TRUST ME...

...YOU WILL *PAY*.

I BELIEVE HER

SO DO I

TAKE SUSTENANCE FROM YOUR OL' PA. EAT YOUR SHADOW!

HEY, THIS MUSHROOM'S HARD AND COLD LIKE A POPSICLE. I *CAN'T* BITE IN!

CHOMP

OH DO - ☼Y ☼ONGUES ☼UCK! ITH'S ☼*ROZEN!!* ☼*ELP!*

YOU KNOW WHY THE MUD *SMELLS*, DON'T YOU LIL' SARA? IT'S *NOT* MUD. IT'S COMING FROM *YOU*...

YOU'RE SWIMMING IN A WORLD OF YOUR OWN - -

☼ADDY WHAD ☼OO YOU ☼EAN?

ENOUGH!!!

I'M SUMMONING FORTH THE *HORSE SPIRIT* - ...*MAXX!*

WITH A SINGLE STRIKE SHALL HE COME. HE SHALL REPLACE THIS HORSE TOTEM AND *SAVE US ALL!* RETURN GREAT PROTECTOR! YOUR PRINCESS CALLS...

WHAM

WHY DIDN'T HE COME?

I DUNNO.

NORBERT, YER *UP*. IN FACT YOU *MISSED* YOUR CUE.

YOU MEAN YOU CAN HEAR WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE SARA'S MIND?

AND DO *NOTHING* ABOUT IT - FRUSTRATING HUH? YOU'D BETTER WAIT *OUT HERE*, MARK.

OKAY.

OKAY, JUST STAND HERE, AND WITH ANY LUCK, THE PRINCESS WILL, ONCE MORE, CALL YOU...

MAXX, YOU ARE *HOME* AT LAST.

YES MY PRINCESS, I HAVE RETURNED TO *HELP*.

FOR I AM THE...

SHOOT. MY "LINK'S" BROKEN. HOPE EVERYTHING'S OKAY.

ELP! ITH ⁘OLD AN I ⁘AN'T ⁘REATHE!

SO, MY PRINCESS, WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO?

SHOULD LET HER CRY, SAVE OUTBACK.

STOP CRYING AND SAVE LIL' SARA.

UHH....

A MOST *INTELLIGENT* RESPONSE, FOR ONE CALLING HERSELF A "PRINCESS". WHO *ARE* YOU STRANGERS? *EXPLAIN YOURSELVES!*

AND *WHY* HAVE YOU STUCK A *MIDGET* ONTO MY FROZEN TRUNK? IT TICKLES SOMETHING AWFUL. I'VE GOT A GOOD MIND TO...

..SMOTHER HER!

Chapter Five

The Wake

EATEN? WHERE'S THIS "*JULIE*" LIL' SARA SEEKS?!?

THREE GUESSES. IF YOU HURRY, YOU COULD *CUT HER OUT OF ME* BEFORE SHE'S *COMPLETELY* DIGESTED... HEH, HEH.

WHAT FOUL MANNER OF BEAST CREATED YOU, CATERPILLAR?

YOU DID, PRINCESS. *IAGO* WAS BORN OF YOUR MOTHER'S *EMPTY WORDS* AND LIL' SARA'S *NEGATIVE FEELINGS*. AND I'M A SLUG, NOT A CATERPILLAR, THANK YOU.

I THINK YOU'RE A VILE, SICK, *MISHAPE* WHO DESERVES TO *DIE!!!*

LET'S ALL TAKE A MOMENT, GET CENTERED, REMEMBER *WHY* WE'RE HERE, AND WHATEVER YOU *FEEL* IS... "OKAY".

...TO FEEL *ANGRY.*

...OR TO FEEL *EATEN.*

AND THAT'S... "OKAY".

THEN YOU WON'T MIND IF THE MAXX "FEELS" LIKE CUTTING YOU UP...

TO SAVE OUR *JULIE!*

OF COURSE NOT, BUT KILLING *ME* WON'T STOP SARA'S *UGLY-SELF-IMAGE.* I'M ONLY A *SYMBOL* OF-

YEAH, BUT IT WILL MAKE MAXX FEEL *SOOOOO* MUCH BETTER!

OH, VERY WELL THEN-

MAXX-- IS IT *HER,* THIS "JULIE" PERSON?

HEY MY *TONGUE'S* FREE! COOOOL!

IT'S A *DOLL.* WHAT DOES IT *MEAN* MAXX?

I THINK *SHE* LEFT IT TO TELL US...

"...SHE GOT BACK HOME OKAY."

DAVE, W-WHAT ARE *YOU* DOING HERE?

I TOOK A SHOT YOU'D COME BACK TO THE *SAME ALLEY* HE *TOOK* YOU IN. ARE YOU OKAY?

WHUMP

I THINK SO. LIKE YOU *CARE?*

SHUT UP, HERE- LET ME HELP YOU-

HEY "DAVE"- I DON'T NEED ANY BODY'S *HELP.* OR *PITY!*

JUST BECAUSE MY SON RAN OUT AND I'M BETWEEN JOBS DOESN'T GIVE YOU THE RIGHT TO... TO...

OKAY I GOT IT. YOU'RE EXEMPT FROM FEELINGS OF *VULNERABILITY* THAT THE REST OF US HAVE..

WE BETTER GET BACK TO GONE'S *STORAGE BINS* AND CHECK ON *SARA.* GONE'S GUIDING SARA THROUGH HER *OWN* OUTBACK...

WELL... YEAH. SO WHERE TO NOW?

"... LOOKING FOR *YOU.*"

MAXX, PRINCESS, WHERE'S *JULIE*?!?

POP POP POP

SHOOT! THEY'RE ALL GONE! BUT I STILL HAVEN'T *CRIED* YET!

UH OH, I THINK I HAD AN "ACCIDENT."

DADDY!! IT'S REALLY YOU THIS TIME! UH... WHY'D I POO *POWDERED DONUTS?*

'CAUSE LIKE FREUD SAID, A SUCCESSFUL "MOVEMENT" IS A CHILDS FIRST *"GIFT"* TO HIS PARENT! YOU NEED TO GO BACK TO A TIME *BEFORE* YOU LEARNED REPULSION OVER *BODY FUNCTIONS!*

FIRST, YOU MUST *REVEL* IN YOUR *BODY'S FAT!*

HAVE COMPASSION FOR ALL PARTS *SOFT AND FLABBY.*

PLOP

COOL. LOOK I'M A FAT LITTLE BABY.

NOW *BODY HAIR!* LET IT *GROW* OUT. *EMBRACE* IT!

GEE, ISN'T IT KINDA *GROSS* GROWN OUT?

GROSS IS *DISCONNECTING* FROM YOUR BODY BY SHAVING OFF PART OF IT!

SO WHAT NOW?

BODY ODORS. YOUR PERSONAL SMELL, EVEN PASSING GAS.

MMMMM NOT BAD. THAT PART OF ME TOO.

SSSNIFFFFFFFFF

SSSSNIFFFFFF

WAIT DON'T TELL ME- *FLUIDS* RIGHT?!? THIS IS MY FAVORITE PART.

UH... YEAH...

SWEAT, NASAL MUCUS, URINE, WHY EVEN... TEARS.

SLAP SLAP SLAP SLAP SLAP SLAP

GREAT- I *LOVE* WATER, EVEN *PEE-PEE!*

SO WHAT'S LEFT?

WELL, YOUR *REMAINS,* BUT I THINK WE'VE COVERED THAT WITH "THE DONUTS". THANKFULLY.

WHEW, THANKFULLY! IT KINDA GOES AGAINST ALL MY INSTINCTS TO REVEL IN MY REMAINS.

NO KIDDING.

FAT-ASS DUMB MORON UGLY JERK STUPID GEEK KLUMSY FOOL

WHAT'S HAPPENING? I FEEL LIGHTER.

I'LL SHOW YOU. FOLLOW ME.

MORON
UGLY
JERK
STUPID
FOOLISH
CLUMSY
YOU'VE RECONNECTED WITH YOUR TRUE *SELF*, AND ARE FLOATING TOWARD ANOTHER STATE OF AWARENESS.
BUT I CAN'T GET AIR-BORNE. WHAT'S HOLDING ME DOWN?
YOU'RE STILL TOO HEAVY.
THERE'S SOMETHING INSIDE YOU HAVEN'T LET GO OF.
TEARS OF COMPASSION MUST BE SPILLED *FOR* SOMEONE.
BUT NO ONE'S LEFT! OH... IT'S *YOU*! I NEED TO CRY FOR *YOU*, DADDY.
NO. *ENOUGH* TEARS HAVE BEEN SHED BECAUSE OF *ME*, SARA.
IT'S *YOU*, STUPID. *YOU* MUST CRY, OR YOUR INSIDES WILL *DRY UP!*
ME?

YOU'RE RIGHT, DADDY. THAT'S *IT!* I'VE NEVER KNOWN SUCH *PEACE* AND *WARMTH* INSIDE. *THIS* MUST BE THE *SECRET* OF *HAPPINESS!*

SUGAR- WHERE'RE YOU GOING?

WAIT, HONEY! DON'T GO! IS THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS REALLY WORTH LEAVING THIS EARTH FOR?

OOPS- BAD QUESTION...

THINK OF YOUR FRIENDS: DAVE, JULIE, THAT BLOND GUY, STEVE...

THIS WAY. IT'S WARMER OVER *HERE.* FOLLOW ME AND WE'LL *PLAY!*

BUT IT DOESN'T *LAST* SARA. WE HAVE TO *GO BACK.* WE CAN'T STAY HERE *FOREVER.*

WHY NOT?

'CAUSE YOU'RE NOT *DONE* YET.

THEY'LL BE FINE. YOU'LL LOOK AFTER THEM. EVERYTHING'S CRYSTAL CLEAR NOW. GOODBYE, DADDY.

I LOVE YOU.

YOU MEAN TRAPPED IN A CRIPPLED INCARNATION, DOOMED TO LIVE LIFE IN A HEARTLESS WORLD...

... INCAPABLE OF UNDERSTANDING HOW TO ESCAPE ITS SUFFERING?

YES, *THAT!*

LOOK, YOUNG LADY- GET BACK INTO YOUR OWN BODY THIS INSTANT, OR I'M NEVER TAKING YOU TO ANOTHER OUTBACK! DO YOU HEAR ME?

SARA?

I CAN'T, DADDY. GO BACK IF YOU MUST,BUT I'M GOING *ON.*

SARA, COME RIGHT BACK THIS INSTANT!

...PLEASE?

HAPPINESS IS JUST ANOTHER *TRAP.* TRUST ME!

OH, GOD...

SARA?

GREAT. NOW IT'S SO BRIGHT I CAN'T SEE *ANYTHING.*

DAMMIT! I'M HER FATHER! I'M SUPPOSED TO *PROTECT* HER! NOT *LOSE* HER TO-

HEY- WHAT'S THAT SOUND? IT MUST BE HER HAND BACK ON EARTH. SOUNDS LIKE IT'S OVERLOADING.

THE SOUND OF HER BREATH SHOULD GUIDE ME BACK TO THE STORAGE BINS...

THERE! JUST IN TIME, TOO.

MARK, GET OUT OF HERE! SARA'S ABOUT TO... TO... WELL, "BLOW UP"!

WHAT ABOUT YOU?!?

I'M HER FATHER. I GOT HER *INTO* THIS- I'LL GET HER *OUT.*

NOW GO!!!

MARK, WHAT'S THAT LIGHT, IS SARA OKAY?

BOOOM!!!

NO,
SHE'S NOT.

MARK, TAKE ME TO HER! HURRY!

OKAY, OKAY!

OH GOD...
... SARA?

OKAY, GONE- I'M ONLY GOING TO ASK *ONCE*.

AND I WANT A STRAIGHT ANSWER.

WHERE'S SARA?

I'M NOT SURE. SHE JUST SORT OF... SLIPPED AWAY.

I... LOST HER.

LOST HER!??! YOU DON'T JUST *LOSE* SOMEBODY!

YOU CREEP! YOU SCREWED AROUND AND KILLED HER!!!

GO AHEAD- KILL ME. I'M ALREADY DEAD- MAY AS WELL BE.

EVERYONE WHOSE LIFE I TOUCH CRUMBLES BEFORE ME. YOU'RE RIGHT. I *DID* KILL SARA.

YOU ALWAYS MANAGE TO FEEL BROKEN UP *AFTER* YOU WRECK PEOPLE'S LIVES.

BUT *YOU'RE* THE ONE WHO ALWAYS WINDS UP BACK HERE, SAFE AND SOUND, TO "FEEL BAD".

YOU'RE RIGHT. I LEFT MY BABY ALONE. I CAN'T EVEN "FEEL" IF SHE'S ALIVE OR NOT. I'VE ABANDONED HER...

AGAIN.

BLAH BLAH BLAH- YOU LET HER DIE- PERIOD. I'LL BE AT SARA'S PLACE. I GOTTA THINK. C'MON MARK.

NO, MOM. I'M STAYING. AND YOU'RE *WRONG.* GONE WAS TRYING TO-

FINE. *EVERYBODY* CRAP OUT ON ME. I'M OUTTA HERE.

I'M NOT MOVING UNTIL...

I CAN *FEEL* HER... AGAIN.

MAXX... UH, I MEAN *DAVE*, IS SARA REALLY DEAD?

I DUNNO, MARK. I *THINK* GONE JUST "MISPLACED" HER.

THAT'S NOT FUNNY.

NO, IT'S NOT. SORRY.

LOOK, YOUR MOM AND GONE- THERE'S SOME OLD WOUNDS THERE.

DAVE, CAN YOU FEEL ANY "MAXX STUFF" THAT MIGHT TELL YOU IF SARA'S OK?

SORRY KID. I CAN'T. IT WAS A LIFETIME AGO.

BUT BELIEVE ME, IF *ANYONE* CAN FIND SARA, IT'S OLD UNCLE ARTIE.

CHRIST, ARTIE- YOU'VE BEEN UP ALL NIGHT! YOU CAN'T STAY HERE FOREVER.

I TAKE FROM YOUR POSTURE THAT YOU STILL CAN'T FIND HER.

I *KNOW* SHE'S ALIVE.

I CAN... *FEEL* HER PRESENCE... BUT SHE'S WITHOUT *FORM.*

SO WHAT NOW?

NOW WE START ALL OVER. AND THIS TIME WE GET IT *RIGHT!*

UH, EXCUSE ME, BUT WHO ARE YOU?

OH, YOU MUST BE STEVE. DAVE MENTIONED YOU.

I'M JULIE WINTERS. I WAS AN OLD FRIEND OF SARA'S.

YOUR *WHAT?*

THE COUNTER... OH NEVER MIND. WHERE'S SARA?

WELL THAT'S WHY I'M HERE. YOU'D BETTER SIT DOWN.

LISTEN- I DON'T MEAN TO BE RUDE, BUT YOU'RE SITTING ON MY "PSYCHIC RESEARCH LAB." COULD YOU *GET OFF* IT PLEASE?

STEVE- SHE'S DEAD. IM SORRY.

NO I DON'T BELIEVE IT. SHE'S STILL HERE- I CAN FEEL HER.

YOU'RE THE GUY WHO TRIES TO "MOVE WATER WITH HIS MIND", RIGHT?

I MAY NOT BE PSYCHIC...

BUT I KNOW SHE'S ALIVE, SOMEHOW.

HEY- WHATEVER HELPS...

SARA'S PSYCHICALLY CONNECTED TO FLUIDS- ALWAYS HAS BEEN.

LIKE *THIS!!!*

SHE COULD BE IN *HERE.* IN *THIS.*

STEVE, YOU TAKIN' ANY *MEDS* I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?

SARA...

WATER...

OH GOD- WHAT IF I *DRANK* HER?

:SIGH:

IT'S OK- I KNOW YOU THINK I'M NUTS, BUT SARA USED TO BELIEVE STUFF TOO. *I'M* NOT THE ONLY ONE.

YOU AND ME BOTH.

SCREW IT ALL TO HELL!

AW- WHO AM I KIDDING? I'VE NEVER *BEEN* PSYCHIC, NEVER *WILL* BE.

I LOSE MY CLOSEST FRIEND, AND ALL I CAN DO IS PLAY "PSYCHIC BOY". SCREW IT.

DAVE- IT'S ME, GONE.

YEAH, IT'S OPEN.

KNOCK KNOCK

I BROUGHT AN OLD FRIEND OF YOURS.

OH, YEAH? WHO?

NOT WHO, BUT WHAT.

HERE.

IT'S YOUR OLD COSTU-

I *KNOW* WHAT IT IS.

WHY DON'T YOU TRY IT ON, FOR OLD TIMES' SAKE, AND GO HANG OUT WITH JULIE?

WHY?!?

DO IT, AND YOU'LL SEE. IT'S OUR ONLY SHOT AT FINDING SARA.

I THINK YOU'RE *CRACKING UP.*

PROBABLY, BUT SO WHAT? THE POINT IS, WE'RE GOING TO FIX ALL OUR MISTAKES.

SARA WON'T LOSE ME...

JULIE CAN STOP HER OWN RAPE...

AND I WILL AVOID MY OWN SORDID PAST.

AND ME?

IF JULIE'S NOT RAPED, YOU'LL NEVER BECOME THE MAXX. YOUR LINK WITH JULIE WILL BE GONE. ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU ALWAYS WANTED?

DUNNO. I'M NOT SURE...

WELL, WHILE YOU'RE MULLING IT OVER, MY DAUGHTER'S IN LIMBO. THINK ABOUT IT.

SLAM!

WELL, THAT'S IT. THAT STEVE GUY DROPPED THE KEY OFF. HE SURE DIDN'T WASTE ANY TIME MOVING OUT. SOME FRIEND.

STRANGE. JUST A FEW DAYS AGO, I COULD'VE ACTUALLY *MET* SARA. :SIGH:

I HAVEN'T SEEN HER SINCE SHE WAS- WHAT- 16,17?

HEY MOM- YOU OK?

I GUESS, HON. SORRY ABOUT YESTERDAY.

S'OK.

I WISH I COULD'VE GOT TO KNOW SARA BETTER. I MEAN... YOU KNOW, BEFORE-

YEAH, I KNOW...

WELLLLL... STICK AROUND, AND MAYBE YOU CAN STILL KNOW HER, LIKE THROUGH ME.

YOU?

I KNEW SARA WHEN YOU WERE STILL IN DIAPERS, BUB.

PROMISE YOU WON'T RUN OFF THIS TIME?

DON'T GUILT-TRIP ME. YOU *KNOW* I LEFT TO *PROTECT* YOU.

SO YOU PROMISE, THEN?

NO PROMISES. I'LL DO WHAT I HAVE TO TO PROTECT-

OH, LAY OFF THAT PROTECTING CRAP, MOM. WHY DON'T YOU JUST COME OUT AND *ADMIT* YOU NEVER WANTED A SON?

YOU *DITCHED* ME, HUH?!?

:SIGH:

YOU GIVE GONE ALL THAT CRAP, BUT YOU'RE JUST LIKE HIM. YOU CARE ABOUT YOURSELF MORE THAN ME OR SARA.

THAT'S ALL ADULTS *EVER* CARE ABOUT- THEMSELVES.

SLAM

WITH FRIENDS LIKE *YOU*, NO *WONDER* SARA DISAPPEARED.

:SIGH:

UH... HELLO?

JULIE?
...THAT YOU?

IT'S DARK...
HARD TO SEE... JULIE?...
WHERE AM I?

SARA?

Chapter Six

SARA?

I DON'T THINK YOU'RE GONNA FIND HER IN *THERE!*

UH... RIGHT, I MUST LOOK LIKE AN IDIOT.

I FEEL LIKE AN IDIOT, WEARING THIS STUPID OUTFIT. AT LEAST WHEN I WAS PART RABBIT, THE MASK WAS PART OF MY FACE.

NOW THAT I'M A MAN, I'M JUST A DORK WITH A LAMPSHADE.

I THINK IT'S CUTE.

DAVE, COME HERE -- YOU'RE GONNA MISS IT!

SPRINKLERS! THERE'S WATER IN SPRINKLERS, RIGHT?

SARA, CAN YOU HEAR ME, HONEY?

MOM, WILL YOU QUIT RUNNING AROUND MUTTERING LIKE A NUT? WE'RE PRETTY BUSY HERE.

YEAH -- I'LL TRY NOT TO INTERFERE WITH YOUR "IMPORTANT GUY STUFF ".

WHY IS WATER COMING FROM THE CLOSET?

COW SHID I KNOW?

HEH -- GOOD ONE.

SARA?

I LOVE THIS "FRED FLOWER AND UNCLE ITALIAN MOOSE" SHOW.

I DON'T GET IT.

MARK, DID STEVE LOCK THIS CLOSET BEFORE HE LEFT?

WHAT'S LEAKING IN HERE, ANYWAY?

BEATS ME.

LET'S SEE -- WHERE ELSE IS THERE WATER? I KNOW --

DON'T WORRY, HONEY -- DADDY LOST YOU, BUT WE'LL GET YOU BACK.

SARA... ARE YOU THERE?

THIS IS NUTS. I CAN'T KEEP TALKING TO TOILETS AND FAUCETS THE REST OF MY LIFE. THIS IS EITHER GRIEF, OR SARA'S NOT DEAD, OR GONE'S PLAYING MIND GAMES WITH ME.

PEOPLE DON'T COME BACK FROM THE AFTERLIFE AS TALKING WATER. *RUNNING* WATER, MAYBE -- WELL, AT LEAST I HAVEN'T LOST MY SENSE OF HUMOR...

MEANWHILE, MARK AND MAXX BLISSFULLY WATCH THE BOOB TOOB, WHILE I RIDE THE CHOO CHOO TO BONKERSVILLE.

GOD, THIS SHOW IS STUPID. WHY DOES THAT MOOSE STAY WITH THAT FLOWER GUY, ANYWAY?

OH, WELL -- AT LEAST MARK'S BONDING WITH *SOMEONE*...

FRED FLOWER AND UNCLE ITALIAN MOOSE SHOW

"UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S THE TV..."

And now let's join Uncle Italian Moose and Fred Flower...

OK, LET'S SEE. NINE MONTHS BEHIND ON RENT...

GAS TURNED OFF.

SIX-FOOT MOOSE THAT WON'T WORK.

NO FOOD AND DOWN TO MY LAST PACK OF CIGARETTES,

AND THE ONLY THING KEEPING US WARM IS THE GLOW OF THIS CRAPPY TV.

YET THE WARM-A GLOW OF THE TV ECHOES THE WARM-A GLOW OF OUR FRIENDSHIP.

YEAH AND WE'D BE WARMED BY SOMETHING OTHER THAN THE SPANISH CHANNEL IF YOU HADN'T BROKEN THE STUPID *KNOB*.

BUT I *LIKE-A* THE SPANISH CHANNEL. "SABADO GIGANTE"... NOW *THAT'S-A* SHOW!

BUT YOU DON'T SPEAK SPANISH.

IS-A THAT-A CRIME?

FLOWER WOULDN'T BE MINDIN' A BEER RIGHT ABOUT NOW.

OK, WE'RE PLAYING *THIS* GAME -- MAKE THE FLOWER GET HIS OWN BEER...

OK, I'LL GET *MY OWN* BEER.

THUMP!

NO, NO -- DON'T GET UP... UNGH... MAN, THIS POT'S HEAVY!

GOD, THE PAIN!!!

OK-A, FRED FLOWER, I'LL-A GET IT.

NO, NO -- YOU STAY WARM IN FRONT OF THE TV.

I THINK-A FRED FLOWER CAN-A MOVE PRETTY FAST WHEN HE WANNA.

YOU THINK I'M FAKIN'?!? 'CAUSE IF YOU THINK I'M FAKIN' --

KNOCK KNOCK KN

IT'S-A EMPTY. YOU AND THE NUN DRANK 'EM ALL A-LAST-A NIGHT.

OH YEAH. I FORGOT. GREAT -- WHO'S AT THE DOOR?

I BET IT'S-A YOUR FRIEND, REGINA.

♪ SHE'S GOT AN EYE PATCH... SHE'S GOT AN EYE... ♪

MENTION IT, AND YER A DEAD MOOSE.

HI REGINA -- NICE HAIR.

HEY, MOOSE. LIKE MY NEW BLACK EYE PATCH?

WHAT EYE PATCH?

OKAY...

HEY! I'VE GOT TWO TICKETS TO WRESTLING TONIGHT. IF FRED'S NOT HERE, YOU WANNA GO?

THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP

WRESTLING? I'M *THERE!*

HEY BABE -- WE GOT A COUPLA HOURS BEFORE THE FIRST BOUT. HAVE A SEAT.

SURE.

WHUMP

I TELL YA, REG -- SOMETIMES I DON'T KNOW WHY I PUT UP WITH THAT BLUE MOOSE.

WHY ***DO*** YOU GUYS STAY TOGETHER, ANYWAY?

I CAN'T LOSE THE GUY. I MADE ONE MISTAKE.

I SAVED HIS BUTT IN DESERT STORM. NOW MR. ANTLERS THINKS HE OWES ME HIS LIFE.

BOOM

RAT RAT RAT RAT

WOW! NO WONDER YOU'RE BUDS. WAS HE WITH THE ITALIAN TROOPS?

NO, MOOSE TROOPS.

FRED, DO YOU KNOW A TOBACCO-CHEWING NUN'S SITTING NEXT TO YOU?

FRED, DO YOU REALIZE A ONE-EYED GIRL IN FLANNEL'S SITTING NEXT TO YOU?

REG, SISTER MURRY. SISTER MURRY, REG.

SPIT TOOIE

NICE TO MEET YA.

HEY.

I HEAR YOU PROMISED NOT TO GUILT TRIP THE MOOSE INTO GOING BACK TO WORK.

UH...

YOU GONNA LET HIM BE AN ARTIST? RIGHT.

ER...

WIPE WIPE

♪♫ THERE'RE TIMES IN A WOMAN'S LIFE OF TRANDESCENTIAL BEAUTY. ♫♪

THAT'S-A RIGHT. YOU PROMISED-A, FRED FLOWER. SOMEDAY, I'LL-A BE SO FAMOUS, WE'LL LIVE IN...

WUMP!

...LUXURY'S LAP!

SPIT

SPLAT

SHE'S... INTERESTING...

♪♫ LOOK AT ME, I'M AS HELPLESS AS A KITTEN... ♫♪

SIGH SOMEBODY SHOOT ME.

LATER THAT EVENING

WELL... LOOKEE HERE. PLENTY OF HELP WANTEDS.

CAN'T HEAR YOU -- WATER RUNNING -- I'M WASHING THE DISH.

CLASSIFIED

HELP WANTED

I SEE THERE'S A FACTORY HIRING UNSKILLED LABOR.

EMPLOYMENT OPE

I'D WORK IF I COULD. I KNOW IT'S HARD TO RESPECT A FLOWER WHOSE ROOTS ARE BENT AND PARALYZED.

I'M-A SORRY, FRED FLOWER. MY ARTIST'S HOOFS ARE NOT-A MEANT FOR MANUAL LABOR.

CRACKLE

THE LEAST YOU COULD DO IS TO BREAK OPEN YOUR GIRLY PIGGY BANK, AND THEN WE COULD EAT INSTEAD OF YOU SAVING FOR SOME FRIGGIN' ART SUPPLIES!

DON'T TOUCH-A MY PIGGY BANK, FRED FLOWER! THOSE FIVE BUCKS IS-A MY LIFE-A SAVINGS!

JUST GO OUT AND PLEEEEEEEZE GET A JOB.

I'M A CARICATURIST -- *THAT'S*-A MY JOB.

EVERYBODY DRAWS A BIG-A HEAD AN' A LEETLE BODY. BUT I'M-A *ORIGINAL*.

I DRAW LEETLE HEADS WITH BIG-A BODIES.

YEAH -- THAT'S ORIGINAL ALRIGHT.

WHAT KIND OF IDIOT ARE YOU? MY HEAD'S SO SMALL YOU'VE MADE MY WIFE CRY!

THAT'LL BE FIVE-A BUCKS-A, PLEASE.

By Uncle Italian Moose

THE WORLD IS NOT READY FOR AN ARTIST LIKE UNCLE ITALIAN MOOSE.

ART SUPPLIES

GIVE

GRUNPLE

MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT.

HOW CAN YOU-A SAY THAT, FRED FLOWER?

OK, THE WORLD'S READY.

YOU MOCK-A ME, FRED FLOWER. I WOULD-A GO BACK TO WORK -- BUT I-A CAN'T. MAYBE *YOU* COULD GET A JOB THAT DOESN'T NEED-A LEGS.

YEAH, LIKE A DOORSTOP.

IT'S A *JOB*.

OK -- I CAN SEE WHAT'S GONNA HAVE TO HAPPEN *HERE.*

WHUMP

:SIGH:

FINE! I'M GONNA HAVE TO *KILL* MYSELF, DRAGGIN' MY POT ALL OVER TOWN LOOKIN' FOR WORK, JUST TO PROTECT YOUR GIRLY *HOOVES!*

:CHOKE: BUT I DON'T MIND... I MEAN, I KNOW YOU'D DO THE SAME FOR ME, RIGHT? :COUGH:

I'M A BAD-A MOOSE, FRED FLOWER. I'M GOING TO MOOSE-A HELL.

OK, YOU-A WIN. I'LL-A WORK-A MY HOOFS TO THE BONE.

BUT YOU'VE-A STRAINED THE BONDS OF-A OUR FRIENDSHIP, FRED-A FLOWER. THIS IS A MISTAKE! THIS DAY WILL *HAUNT-A* YOU!

HAUNT MY BUTT.

SLAM!

HEY, FRED, WHERE'S UNCLE MOOSE?

UNCLE *ITALIAN* MOOSE. HE'S AT THE FACTORY.

WHAT?!? BUT YOU *PROMISED!!!*

BACK OFF, BABE. YOU WANNA PAY OUR BILLS?

WHAT ABOUT HIS DREAMS?

CHUNG!

CHUNG!

CHUNG

TRAINEE

HE CAN DREAM AFTER WORK LIKE THE REST OF US.

NOW LISTEN UP. ASSEMBLE ALL SIX PARTS IN 1.2 SECONDS, THEN PULL BACK BEFORE THE METAL SHAFT SLAMS DOWN. THE SECRET IS RHYTHM. IF ANYTHING THROWS OFF YOUR TIMING...

KA-CHUNK

TRAINEE

MOOSE, U.J.

BOSS

...YOU WON'T BE PLAYING PIANO ANY MORE.

KA-CHUNK

KA-CHUNK

AH..

KA-CHUNK

<CHOO!

EEP

HOLY MOTHER OF GOD...

CAUTION

CAUTION

CALL THE AMBULANCE, MORT -- WE GOT ANOTHER ONE...

RAISE YA SIX.

OK, I'M IN. HOW 'BOUT YOU, SISTER? SHOOT -- THE PHONE.

♪♫ I WRITE THE SONGS THAT MAKE THE YOUNG GIRLS CRY. ♫♪

JUST A SECOND, GALS.

ARRRRRIINNGG

BOI BOI BOP

SPIT!

YES? THIS IS FRED FLOWER.

HOSPITAL?

THAT'S RIGHT, A FREAK ACCIDENT. IT'S YOUR ROOMMATE'S HOOVES.

AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

MOOSE, UNCLE ITALIAN

THOSE CHICKS'LL BLAME *ME* -- I KNOW IT!

OK -- EVERYBODY OUT! GAME'S OVER!!! YOU LOSE!!!

FRED! WHAT'S THE DEAL?!?

UH -- THEY NEED MY ADVICE AT THE HOSPITAL. GOTTA GO!

WHOA!!!

GRE-A-A-T! NOW WHAT'LL I DO!?! EVERYTHING HAPPENS TO...

...ME.

GET WELL!

SNIFF

MAAANN, THIS HURTS!

RAW EXPOSED ROOTS.

AAAHHH!!!

HOPE HE'S OK. IF HE'S NOT... I'LL KILL 'IM!

LORD, NO.

IT'S A PSYCHO!

WHACK!

AAAAAAA!

OUCH!!

SPLAT!

DANG IT, MOOSE!! YOU'D BETTER BE CLOSE TO DEATH!

CRUNCH!

I KNOW I AM!

SWEEP

WHEW! THANK GOD IT'S OVER!

PEEEEE

PEE. I LOVE PEE.

YOUR FRIEND NEVER SHOWED, HUH? SORRY.

WELL, GOOD NIGHT, MR. NORWEGIAN ELK.

THAT'S-A UNCLE ITALIAN MOOSE.

OOOOOOKLAHOMA, WHERE THE WIND COMES WHIPPIN' ;PANT PANT; DOWN THE PLAINS...

AMBULANCE

HOSPITAL

GREAT, NOW I'M SISTER MURRY.

HOME STRETCH, FRED ;GASP; -- HANG IN THERE!

SAID, HANG IN THERE.

OH.

HOW'S THAT?

MOOSE -- IT'S ME.

YOU OK?

OH. IT'S-A YOU.

AW JEEZ, MOOSE -- LOOK AT YER MITTS. ARE THEY BROKEN?

MY HOOFS ARE LIKE-A PANCAKES.

OF COURSE THEY'RE-A BROKEN.

LIKE MY ITALIAN-A HEART.

UH-HUH...

NO ONE-A VISITED ME. I DON'T EVEN-A GET A FLOWER.

NOT EVEN A *FRED* FLOWER.

I CAN'T *BELIEVE* I BUSTED MY POT GETTING HERE, AND YOU DON'T EVEN CARE!

IT'S YOUR OWN-A FAULT, FRED FLOWER. YOU BROKE-A YOUR PROMISE. YOU MAKE-A ME WORK, AND I SQUISH-A MY HOOFS.

DON'T MOVE! I'M GONNA CRAWL UP THERE AND BEAT THE LIVING CRAP OUT OF YOU!

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I WENT THROUGH FOR YOU!

EVER LOST A PETAL TO A WEED EATER?

IT *HURTS*, PAL!

I'M *HURTIN'* HERE!

WHY SHOULD *I* APOLOGIZE TO-A *YOU?*

BUT, UH, I ACCEPT YOUR APOLOGY. JUST GIVE ME A PIGGYBACK RIDE, AND LET'S BLOW THIS JOINT.

NOW WE-A EVEN. BECAUSE OF-A YOU, I'VE DRAWN MY LAST-A TEENY HEAD. YOU NOT-A MY FRIEND,FRED FLOWER!

GET-A OUT!

A-LATER

HEY, MOOSE. YOU BACK FROM THE HOSPITAL YET?

HELLO? YOU HOME? TAKIN' A DUMP?

GUESS NOT.

MAYBE HE MOVED OUT...

HE'S GONE. I FINALLY PUSHED HIM TOO FAR. HE'S LEFT FOR GOOD.

HEY! I SHOULD BE HAPPY! SCREW ROOMMATES! I'M A BACHELOR NOW -- CHICKS N' PIZZA EVERY NIGHT!

AND NO MORE *MOOSE!!!!!*

AWWW, I'M KIDDIN' MYSELF. THAT MOOSE IS THE CLOSEST THING TO A FRIEND I'VE GOT. WELL, THERE'S REGINA AND THE NUN... BUT THEY'RE *CHICKS*...

MOOSE, IF YOU'D JUST COME BACK, THIS FLOWER WOULD CHANGE.

I'D BE A BETTER FLOWER...

... A BETTER FRED.

I GOT LOVE, MOOSE, RIGHT HERE IN MY HEART. I'M SORRY...

SPAGHET

♪ I'M-A HOOOOME!!! ♪

ER... HOW LONG YOU BEEN STANDIN' THERE?

YOU SPENT YOUR PIGGYBANK MONEY ON GROCERIES!?!

THAT'S IT ?!?!? TWO BAGS OF GROCERIES? WE *COULD'VE* SETTLED FOR...

JUST GOT-A HOME.

DIDN'T-A HAVE TO. MY WORKERS-A COMP MONEY GAVE-A ME THESE!

I WAS-A HUNGRY...

THAT'S-A IT!!! I-A SCREWED UP AGAIN! MY CAREER IS-A OVER. NO MORE-A DREAMIN' FOR ME. BACK-A TO THE FACTORY!

MILK

PLOP

PLOP!

WELL, GUESS THIS IS WHERE YOU EXPECT ME TO "GO GIRLY" ON YA AND APOLOGIZE. WELL, FORGET IT!

I LOVE-A YOU TOO, FRED-A FLOWER.

BIENVENIDOS A SABADO GIGANTE!

SABADO GIGANTE... NOW *THERE'S* A SHOW.

THE END

FRED FLOWER AND UNCLE ITALIAN MOOSE SHOW

SO THAT'S IT? WHAT A LAME SHOW! THE MOOSE HAS TO GO BACK TO WORK AND FORGO HIS DREAMS, AND THE FLOWER CONTINUES TO BADGER HIM? THEY'RE NO BETTER OFF THAN BEFORE!

I LIKE IT. IT REMINDS ME OF YOU AND MOM.

EXCEPT I'M THE MOOSE.

NO, *I'M* THE MOOSE.

LISTEN, MAXX. WE GOTTA TALK. SOMETHING'S HAPPENING.

YEAH -- YOUR SECOND CHANCE. YOU SHOULD STAY HERE IN SARA'S PLACE. STEVE PAID THE RENT FOR THREE MONTHS. IT'D GET YOU OFF THE STREETS.

SHH. KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN -- I DON'T WANT MARK TO HEAR THIS. WHAT I ***MEAN*** IS, I THINK I'M HAVING SOME PROBLEMS. EITHER I'M GOING NUTS, OR THE ***WORLD*** IS.

OK, GO ON...

YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN, LIKE, AN *AFTER*LIFE, DO YOU?

JULIE, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

I DON'T KNOW... I THINK... I MIGHT BE HEARING... VOICES... LIKE MAYBE...

...SARA'S VOICE... COMING FROM FAUCETS N' SINKS N' STUFF...

... MAXX DID YOU EVER HEAR VOICES?

YOU'RE ASKING THE WRONG GUY, KIDDO.

I THINK I MIGHT BE...

...CRACKING UP...

LISTEN -- DOES SARA'S VOICE TELL YOU TO DO BAD STUFF?

WELL, NO.

THEN YOU'RE *NOT* CRACKING UP. YOU'VE JUST BEEN COOPED UP IN HER APARTMENT TOO LONG. SARA'S DISAPPEARING LIKE THIS HAS GOT US ALL JUMPY.

IS ALL HER STUFF PACKED UP?

YEAH, EXCEPT FOR THAT CLOSET. THE DOOR'S JAMMED.

LEAVE IT. IT'S GOOD LUCK TO HAVE SOME OF SARA'S THINGS AROUND WHEN YOU MOVE IN.

BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHAT'S *IN* THERE.

WELL, WHAT*EVER* IT IS...

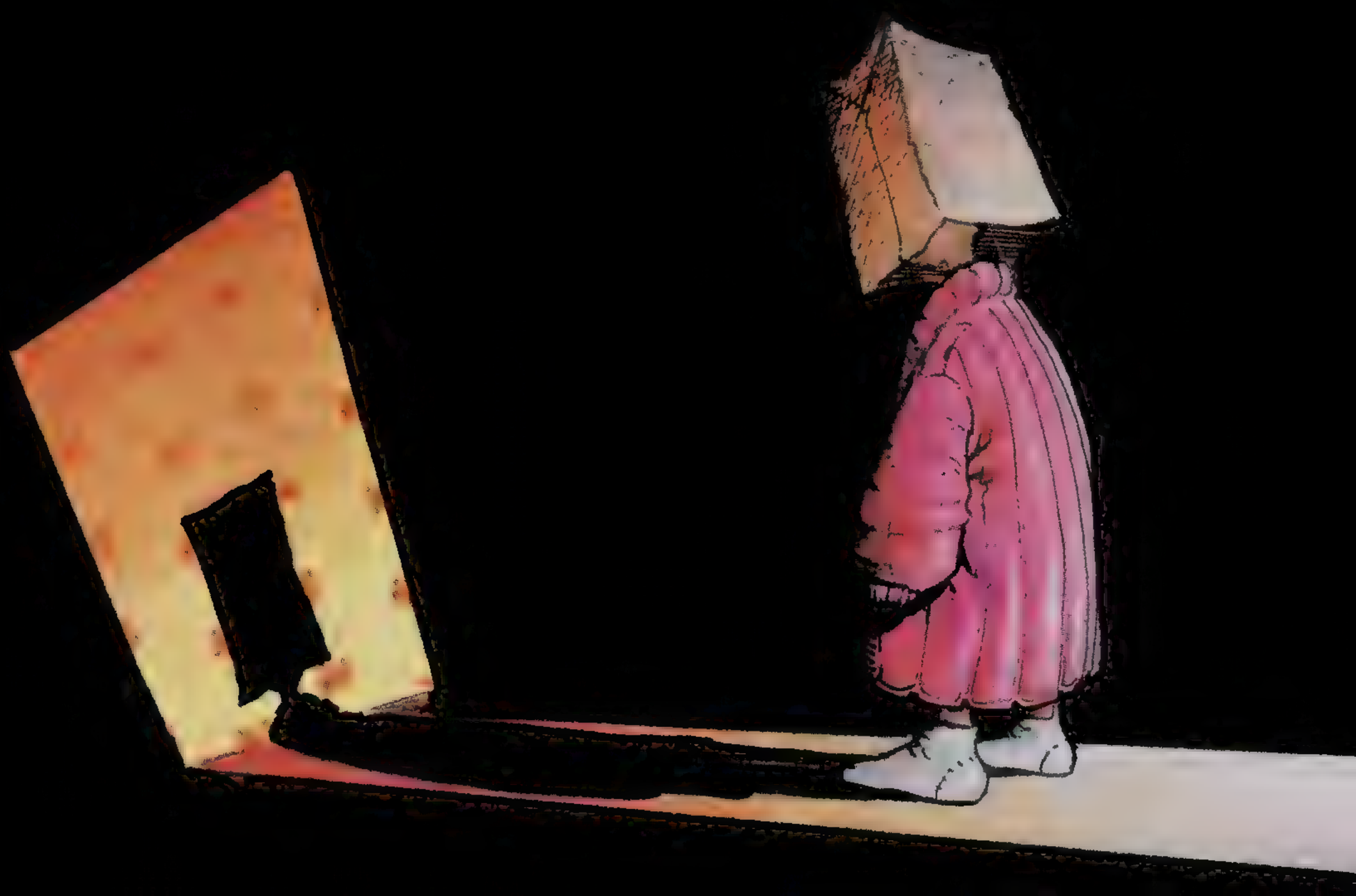
...HOW BAD COULD IT BE?...

MEEP!

THE
WALK

THE MAN

THE ORIGIN OF MR GONE



THE MASK

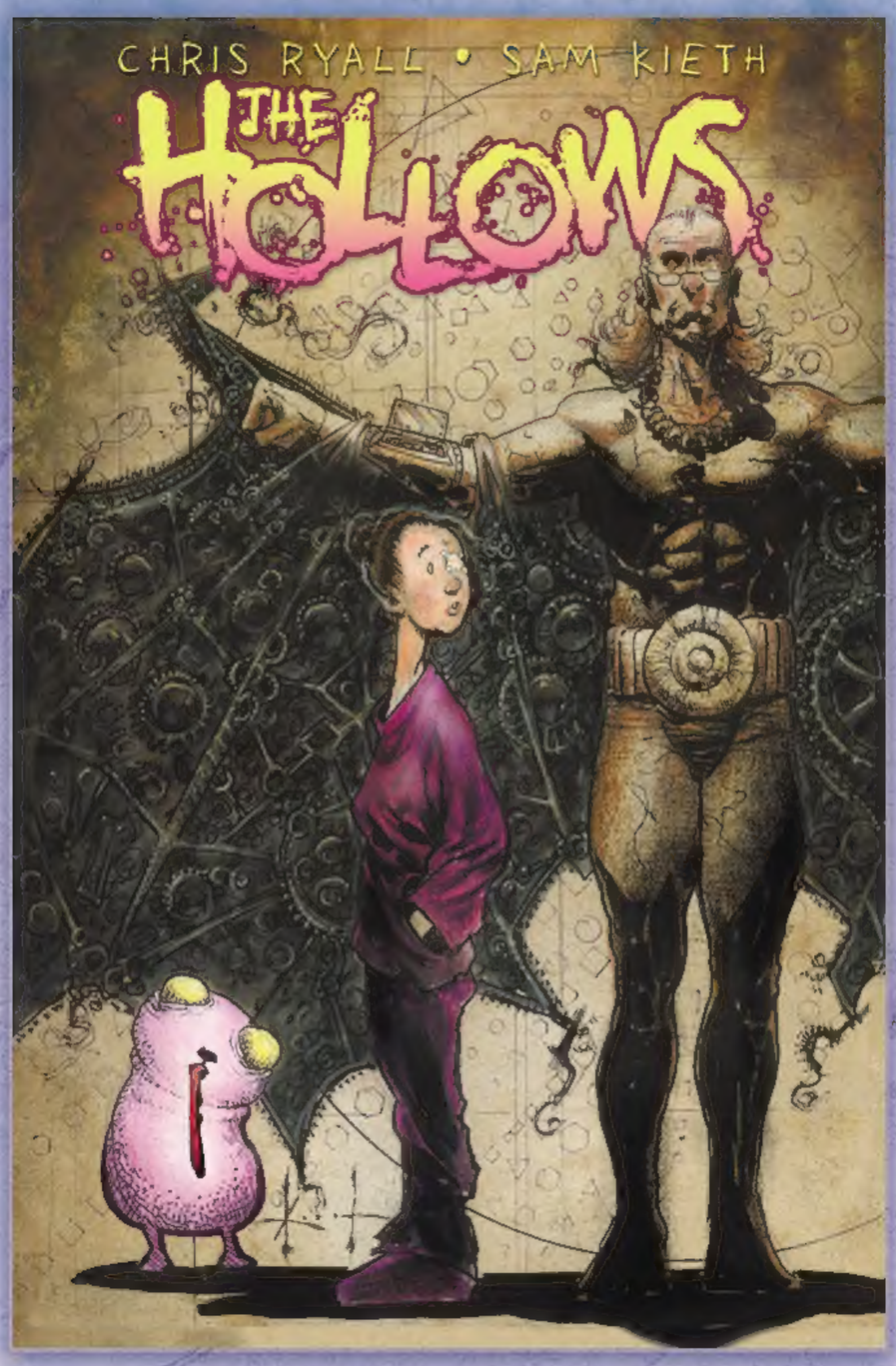
THE MAXX

THE MAXX

maxximized

Sam Kieth

ALSO AVAILABLE



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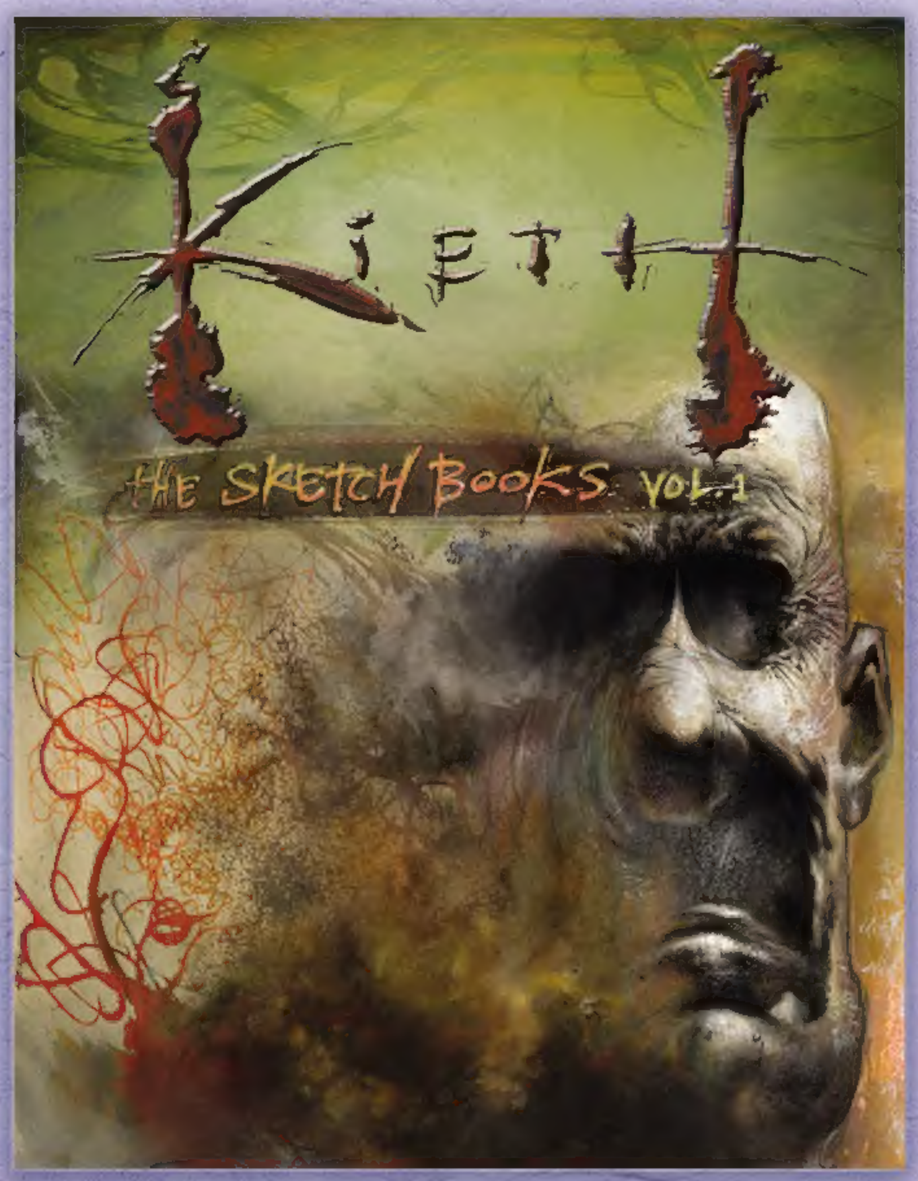

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ISBN: 978-1-60010-650-7